Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/rudolphamina0000chri_e1u1

Rudolph and Amina

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

Rudolph and Amina

OR THE BLACK CROOK

M827r.

New York
THE JOHN DAY COMPANY

Copyright, 1930, by Christopher Morley
Second printing, November, 1930

Printed in the U. S. A.
For The John Day Company, Inc.
By Quinn & Boden Co., Inc., Rahway, N. J.

335951

Chapter

I

N THE very center of Germany are the Harz Mountains, famous for canaries and fairy tales; and among those mountains the most famous is the Brocken. It is a rough wild place and its dark ravines and rocky cliffs have a bad reputation. The Brocken was always supposed to be the home of black magic and evil spirits. In the comfortable little college town of Göttingen, fifteen miles away, students and professors sit gaily for song and supper in sweet-smelling outdoor

beer-gardens; but when a storm comes up and a flicker of lightning pales across the purple sky and the long drums of thunder roll among the mountain crags, they look at each other and are glad to be in the snug companionable town with books and music and mugs of beer. Sometimes it happens that an early spring thunderstorm comes on April 30th, and then they are specially pleased, in the way we are all pleased to be just a little frightened by things we know aren't so. (For instance this very day Helen and Blythe, two small girls who are still too young for this fairy tale, thought they saw a giraffe in the Roslyn woods. It wasn't really a giraffe, it was a branch of yellow forsythia that had got mixed high up in a tall dark tree; but for an instant they thought it was the neck of a giraffe and were a little scared. They laughed about it afterward.)

For in the old days the evening of April 30th was Walpurgis Night, what was called the Witches' Sabbath. Then all the evil spirits held picnic on the Brocken and it was no night for harmless folk to be out in the dark. People in the Harz Mountain country went to bed early that night, and pulled the covers as far up as they would go without getting loose at the bottom. The May Day celebrations the next morning were extra merry because that dangerous night was over and the season of flowers and kindness was safely come.

Once upon a time, and a long time ago, there lived in a quiet valley near the Brocken two young people it would have been a pleasure to know. Amina was the girl and Rudolph was the boy and they loved each other. You will want to know right away just how old Amina was. and I'm not going to say

exactly. If I said she was eighteen, for instance, that would please all the old ladies of eighteen, but anyone who is only sixteen, or as much as nineteen or twenty (lots of people *are* twenty or even older) would be discouraged. Amina was somewhere about eighteen; she herself didn't know for certain, because she had been left an orphan very young. She was adopted and brought up by a rather peevish and silly old lady called Dame Barbara.

The important thing is to know that Amina was very lovely. I think that living with crotchety old Dame Barbara had been good for her character, for Dame Barbara's tantrums had taught Amina to try to be unselfish. She was a good housekeeper; her little bedroom in the attic was as neat as possible; she enjoyed rearranging bureau drawers on rainy days, and she cleaned the canary's cage every

morning before breakfast. This was in the days when bathrooms were rare, and most country people weren't very particular about washing. But just outside Dame Barbara's cottage a little stream came bubbling over a gray rock into a sheltered pool, and in warm weather Amina took a bath there every morning. I wonder if you know how pleasing it is to bathe like that, all alone in the open air, with the sound of falling water and then the cool morning all round your body. The canary sang in his cage outside the cottage door, and a blue streamer of smoke came from the chimney where Amina had lit the kitchen fire. The morning sunshine, bright and strong over the mountain, helped to dry her, and then she twisted her hair in two long yellow braids. I dare say it was those morning bathes, and the mint and lavender that grew by the stream, that made the back of her neck smell

so sweet. At any rate Rudolph said it did; there was no way she could reach around to smell it for herself. Sometimes he kissed her there, just where the two thick braids came together. When he did so it made tickles go up the back of her head, but she liked it.

Now about Rudolph. He was tall and strong, darker than Amina, and usually rather anxious about things. He was a bit more handsome than I really care for, and a bit serious-minded; I believe he would have been tiresome as a constant companion; but Amina did not think so. He had given up his studies because he wanted to be a painter, and he spent all his time with brushes and canvas making pictures of scenes round the village. It is hard to earn a living by painting, until you get to be well-known, and at that time Rudolph had no notion that his pictures of Harz Mountain Peasant Life would some

day hang in the museum in Hanover. But Amina had faith in him; indeed it was by his painting that he had fallen in love with her. He was out one day looking for something to sketch when he crossed the rustic bridge behind the cottage. He saw her in the doorway cleaning the canary's cage, and she made such a pretty picture in her blue dress that he begged her to stay just like that. Quickly he set up his easel and began work. It was hard for Amina, as she had to stay in an uneasy position for a long time; and the canary, who was having his bath in a soup plate, got quite hoarse. It took several sittings to finish the picture, but this gave Rudolph an opportunity to study her, he saw how beautiful she was, and he fell in love with her. Amina said afterward she was glad it was only the canary, and not herself, who was having a bath while the picture was being painted, for she would

have caught a bad cold. Rudolph said it was May and the weather would soon be warmer.

This picture, called *Morgenbad im Harzgebirg* (Morning Bath in the Harz Mountains) was the best thing Rudolph had done. He hoped to sell it for a good price to a dealer in Göttingen who had been interested in his paintings. If so, he and Amina could be married. Dame Barbara did not altogether approve of Rudolph; she believed that artists were unpractical irregular fellows, and she was annoyed by his always wanting Amina to pose for pictures when she might have been busy with the housework. If Rudolph had been wiser he would have offered to do a portrait of the old lady herself, which would have flattered her so that she would have been on his side. She was extremely vain (as you will see later in the story) and thought herself very handsome; Rudolph could easily

have appealed to her vanity. But he was too young and sentimental to think of anything so shrewd. Then one day, while he was painting Amina gathering watercress, paddling with pretty bare legs in the brook (*Harzgebirg: Die Brunnenkresserin*) they were startled by black smoke oozing out of the cottage. Amina had forgotten the gingerbread in the oven, and the whole baking was spoiled. Dame Barbara was furious and forbade him to come back until he could show a hundred silver crowns to support a wife.

"You and your Scenes from Peasant Life!" she shouted. "Instead of Amina getting romantic rheumatism, do something real. See if you can sell a Portrait of Burnt Gingerbread."

Rudolph felt very bitter. He took the picture of Amina and the canary and wrapped it up carefully. He resolved to walk the fifteen miles to Göttingen to see if he could sell it.

Chapter

2

IT WAS a beautiful spring morning when Rudolph set off to walk to Göttingen. He got up at sunrise and shaved carefully—he was still young enough to be rather proud of having to shave—and put some bread and sausage in his knapsack. He slung the painting on his back, and took his mountaineering stick with a spike on the end.

The village of Wolfenstein was just rousing for the day as he went down the street. Wolfenstein was always glad to see the morn-

ing come. At night it stayed home and shuttered its windows, to be safe from the terrors of the forest and not to see the lights of the wicked castle high on the mountain. In the castle lived the evil Count Wolfenstein, the lord of all that territory. Very late at night the windows of his castle still shone with profligate gaiety. You will hear more about that later.

Now the village was opening its shutters to the mild blue air, and hastening to breakfast. Rudolph breathed the familiar aroma of an old-time German hamlet—a mixture of sausage and sewage as the cynical Count called it. The young painter was surprised to meet Carline, a frolicsome maiden and Amina's great friend, outdoors so early. Carline had a teasing humor to which he never knew quite how to reply. She waved a towel at him.

"It's too bad you're in a hurry," she said.

"Amina and I are going to have the first bath of the season."

"Wohl bekomm's," Rudolph answered; but he did not feel that it was the perfect retort. "I'll bring you a cake of soap from Göttingen," he added.

On the bridge he paused to look back. The little pool was hidden, but he saw the first plume of smoke rising from Dame Barbara's chimney and knew that Amina had not neglected her morning chores. This pleased him; he realized that, unlike the frivolous Carline, she would be a conscientious little housewife when she had a home of her own. He himself, as a husband and a great artist, would not need to rise so early. An artist ought to lie in bed in the morning and let his beard grow. He imagined himself very comfortable, drowsily watching Amina dress and braid her hair—a pretty subject for a painting, he

thought. Then she would bring him a well-arranged tray of breakfast: rolls and honey and coffee, with the morning mail leaning against the jug of hot milk. Amina would look charming in her blue wrapper, and she would beg him not to disturb himself. But he would insist on sitting up to open the letters. He would want to see how many wealthy people had written to ask him to paint their portraits.

These cheerful imaginations made him feel bold and brisk. You must not suppose that Rudolph was selfish or vain to think these improbable notions. Amina had encouraged him to do so. Let him think them while he may; he has a hard time coming. Whistling that pretty old tune, *Mit dem Pfeil dem Bogen, durch Gebirg und Thal,* the young painter passed the grist-mill with its mossy water-wheel and came into the deep woods.

Rudolph felt so confident this gay morning, that he decided to take the short cut through the Glen of Balsam. The road to Göttingen follows the stream down the valley, the same stream that Amina was bathing in, and he had a sentimental feeling that by keeping that fortunate water in sight he was close to her. It was pleasant to think that each bright eddy might have been the very one that spun round her curly knee or sluiced her shining shoulder. But by taking a lonely path across a mountain-spur he could shorten his way by a couple of miles.

He would only have done this in bright sunshine, for the Glen of Balsam was much feared by the villagers. In that dark pine-forest the malicious spirits of the Brocken were supposed to have special power. The solitary trail, climbing through a desolate gorge and near a gloomy log cabin, was rarely

used except by lumbermen who always went in groups and with hushed voices. There was strange stillness in those woods. Not even the ticking of insects or the whistle of birds, only sometimes the whisper of a distant waterfall. The log-cabin was the workshop of Der Schwarze Buckel, the Black Crook or Hunchback, an alchemist, a sorcerer. Perhaps the Black Crook was only a lonely old scientist who lived apart not to be interrupted in his studies, but his appearance was disconcerting to simple people. His servant Greppo came to the village sometimes to buy provisions, and was known to be a little weak in his wits. He laughed in a clownish way, and after two mugs of beer spoke strangely of his master's doings. He said that Professor Herzog (which was the Black Crook's real name) could use the waterfall to light the whole village, yes, and the castle too, all night long

and brighter than candles. To which the schoolmaster replied that this was obviously absurd; water was used to put fires out, not to light them. The parson added that the castle used too much light already; lights late at night were ungodly. Thus Greppo was properly rebuked. The Crook himself was never seen in the village. Sometimes, far off in a clearing on the mountainside, they would see his humped figure, bent over in a black cape, trudging with a staff or picking herbs. When a pale ribbon of smoke rose above the forest people said to themselves, "The Black Crook is at his experiments."

But Rudolph was too anxious to shorten his journey to be afraid of these legends. With a firm grip on his stick, and watching his way carefully, he climbed the shadowy trail. The slippery pine needles were silent to walk upon, and the forest was eerily still.

He thought he heard a soft regular pounding, like an engine of some sort, but halting to listen he discovered it was the beating of his own pulse.

Above the sombre twilight of the Glen of Balsam he came to a barren rocky pass where trees had been struck by lightning and then destroyed by fire. We know now that there is iron ore in the mountain which attracts the electricity; but in those days people thought the frequent lightning on the Brocken was just one more evidence of the Black Crook's magic. In that bare place the sun shines hotly, and the snakes like to lie out among the warm stones. Rudolph, perspiring with the burden of his painting, came toiling up the path and feeling lonely.

But he was a true artist, and when he saw the strange shapes of those stricken trees at once he wanted to draw pictures of them.

There was one pale skeleton of a great larch which had long ago been stripped by a tempest; a twisted and tragic figure with two angled branches like arms flung out in desperate appeal. Rudolph could not resist it. In spite of his anxiety to press on, and his nervousness in so grim a place, he put down his painting and sat on a rock to make a sketch.

As his pencil moved over the paper, and he concentrated all his faculties to see the broken tree clearly and find out what it meant, he became more certain that it wanted to say something to him. In the scarred contorted trunk there almost seemed to be the outline of a face, and the stiff gesture of the bare limbs kept pointing over his shoulder. Look behind you, it seemed to say. He paid no attention at first, thinking it foolish to be so imaginative, but then he heard a soft hiss just behind him. He sprang up and looked.

Cowering under a bramble was a white dove which had lamed itself or perhaps caught its wing in a snag of thorns. It crouched helplessly on the ground, fascinated by the cruel glitter of a snake which poised its head to strike. The dark skin of the serpent shone with blue-green shimmer in the brilliant light; its flickering tongue quivered in the blunt jaws, its elastic length was curved with deadly purpose. The horrified bird, too weak to move, waited for the blow.

Rudolph seized his stick and lashed at the snake, which bared its fangs at him with eyes of hatred and then rustled away among the rocks. He picked up the fainting bird, smoothed its soiled feathers, and put it safely in the crotch of the dead tree where it might recover. Then, with a sudden fear of this barren spot he hurried on over the ridge, glad to return to the green and friendly valley.

Chapter

3

WHILE Rudolph is trying to sell his picture in Göttingen, and Amina waits hopefully in Dame Barbara's cottage, I must tell you about the wicked Count Wolfenstein in his castle on the mountain.

Castle Wolfenstein was a wonderful place. It was an old stone fortress built on the plateau of a steep crag, so steep that the Count, leaning over the railing of his terrace, could almost toss a pebble into the village market-place far below. From that high shelf of rock

he looked down on the village as a person in the top gallery of a theatre looks down on the stage. He saw the cobbled square with its stalls of vegetables and fruit on market-day; he saw the cottage chimneys smoking; in a still air he could almost smell his tenants' boiled cabbage and ham, and see perspiration sparkle on the bald head of the innkeeper sitting outside the door with a mug of beer. He overheard the voices of old women in argument, and the chime of the little church rising in musical eddies. He was fond of saying that he saw the village in aquiline perspective: as an eagle would, soaring above. Count Wolfenstein had had a complicated education, which left him with a relish for long words. Perhaps this partly accounted for the doubt with which the village regarded him.

From his high terrace he could see the mossy millwheel, turning slowly in a spray of

foam, and the geranium pots in the window of Dame Barbara's cottage. Nothing is so amusing as looking down on people from above, and he sometimes brought out a spy-glass and entertained himself by watching the village at its daily doings. One warm morning he chanced to see Amina by the pool. He did not believe it at first. He rubbed his eyes, polished the glass lens, and looked again.

Count Wolfenstein was a great believer in the feudal system. If he had lived today he would probably have been a producer of musical comedies, for he was very fond of pretty girls and bright dresses. Most of the comeliest girls in the village were already working in the castle as chambermaids, for it gave the Count and his friends pleasure to see them trotting about in their gay peasant costumes. But he could see at once that Amina was dif-

ferent from the others. He sent his superintendent, Von Puffengruntz, down to the village to find out who she was. Puffengruntz went reluctantly; he disliked going to the village, for he was elderly and too stout, and the climb back up that very steep path was difficult. But in the feudal system you must do what your superior commands, and Puffengruntz obeyed.

I don't want you to get a wrong impression of Count Wolfenstein. He had a reputation for being wicked, and probably it was deserved. His tall sinewy figure, dark pointed beard and gray-green eyes gave him a handsome and dangerous look. He wore purple doublet and hose, a hat with a green feather, and a shiny little dagger in his belt. If he were in a melodrama the audience would know at once, by his pointed beard, that he was one of the Villains, and would hiss. This

would please him, for he had an acute sense of humor.

Very likely some of his ill fame was due to this excessive sense of the ludicrous. He had a tremendous appetite for being amused. He was never so happy as when some party was going on. From other lonely castles in the Harz Mountains he would invite lords and ladies of high degree; or even of medium degree. Then the terraces were lit with colored lanterns and torches, there was masquerading and music in the great ballroom, the pretty chambermaids did folk-dances on the terrace, wine and cake were set out on tables in the shrubbery and beer and pretzels for the retainers in the courtyard. Plain burghers in the village heard the sounds of this merriment they were not invited to join, and naturally they were indignant. Nothing looks so annoying as the hilarity of other

people. Sometimes after an evening of wine and charades Count Wolfenstein's parties grew very lively. Puffengruntz would play the bagpipes on the balustrade, and excited guests would applaud by tossing empty goblets over the cliff. After the village parson's kraut-patch had been flattened out by an empty beer-keg that came rolling down the mountainside the legend of the Count's wickedness grew apace. But there was little the villagers could do, for a feudal count was everyone's landlord, and sheriff and chief-of-police as well.

Even in the feudal system, maid-servants were allowed the usual Thursday afternoon out. On that day (which was market-day) all the chambermaids used to troop back to the village and regale their friends with gossip of the doings up at the castle. Count Wolfenstein's mysteries improved by narration, and

many a young peasant wench whom the Count hardly knew by sight would tell how he had fixed her with his crystal-green gaze until she trembled; then he had laughed strangely and passed on. The servants reported also that in his intervals of quiet the Count shut himself in his library to read books. It was certain that these volumes were cryptic and dangerous: they were kept in glass cases (to prevent the evil spirits from escaping) and one of the girls had been instantly dismissed for attempting to examine them. Worse still: it was even known that his lordship was on genial terms with the Black Crook himself. The sorcerer sometimes came to visit the castle, and he and the Count sat late on the terrace disregarding summer lightning that flickered in the sky, using difficult words and laughing in an unaccountable way. Often they left sheets of paper lying about, covered with strange diagrams.

All this was cause for anxiety, for petition to Saint Stalacta, the patron goddess of the region, who was virtuous people's only defence against the powers of woe. Yet the odd thing was that in spite of these sinister reports there was no lack of young women eager for employment at the castle.

It so happened that the Black Crook called at the castle the same afternoon that Herr Puffengruntz had gone down to make inquiries about Amina. When the fat superintendent (chamberlain, he preferred to call himself) came wheezing back from his mission, he found the Count and his guest sitting at their ease on the terrace with a bottle of wine and some old books. They were bent over the pages and arguing in mysterious language.

"Speaking of woodcuts," the Count was saying, "wait till I show you my Albrecht

Dürer *De Symmetria Partium*, printed at Nürnberg in 1534."

"I know the book well," replied the Crook. "Printed by Hieronymus Formschneyder. But my dear sir, as a connoisseur give it its full title. *De Symmetria Partium in Rectis Formis Humanorum Corporum.*"

"You are something of a pedant, Professor," said the Count.

"I will match you your Dürer with my Strassburg Boccaccio," retorted the Crook. "I mean of course the 1535 edition, the only complete translation in the whole 16th century. *Die vorher oder spaeter erschienenen Ausgaben verstümmelt oder interpoliert wurden.*" *

"Excuse me for changing the subject," interrupted Puffengruntz, who understood

* The earlier and later editions were mutilated or bowdlerized.

nothing of this jargon and was somewhat out of temper. "I might well have been verstümmelt myself, clambering these precipices for your lordship's whim."

"Ah, Von Puff," said the Count, looking up. "Sit down, refresh yourself. You bring news of the unknown charmer? You do not change the subject as much as you imagine."

"The symmetry of the human form was precisely our topic," said the Crook, with his sinister cackle. "Neither you nor I, Herr Puffengruntz, offer personal illustration of it, but we are the better fitted to admire it in others."

"Is she beautiful?" inquired the Count, pushing the books aside.

Puffengruntz was flattered to sit with his lordship and the powerful alchemist. He endeavored by delay to increase the effect of

his mission. He wiped his forehead repeatedly, settled himself heavily in a chair, accepted a glass of wine, and cleared his throat importantly.

"Speak up, speak up!" exclaimed Wolfenstein.

"Your Worship, she is marvellous. Absolutely grade A, as tender as a young sausage. Just your type, skin like milk, pigtails as blonde as butter."

"I do not approve your metaphors," said the Count. "After all, we are not cannibals. Why haven't we heard of the girl before? If she is so appetizing, offer her a position as waitress."

"Impossible, your lordship. She is not of the domestic class at all. Her origin is mysterious, but she is reputed to be of good lineage. She has lived very secretly with a foster mother, an eccentric old woman not without

merit. Dame Barbara is aware of the girl's value and would not allow her to go into service."

"You interest me," said the Count, his bright eyes sparkling. "So she has pride, eh? Excellent."

"Frankly, Dame Barbara has serious ambitions for her," said Von Puff. "The old lady is a trifle cracked, but she appreciates social distinctions. I must say she was very cordial to me personally. I was quite pleasantly entertained."

"The deuce you were," said the Count. "Well, at least I'm glad you had some compensation for your scramble down the mountain. But to the point. How did you arrange matters?"

"There are complications," said the superintendent.

"Complications?" exclaimed the Count,

growing vexed. "Absurd. Are we a feudal system or are we not?"

"Even the feudal system," said the Black Crook thoughtfully, "is subject to the movements of astrology. While you were speaking I have reckoned a brief horoscope of the present influences. There are stars in the ascendant whose immediate aspect is doubtful."

"Tush, tush," exclaimed the Count. "The only stars I care for are a pair of bright eyes. Reckon me an ascension of Venus. Bring her up to the castle and introduce me."

"Your lordship, I fear the girl's affections are chartered," said Von Puff. "There is a lover, young Rudolph, an artist of some promise. He left this very morning for Göttingen in hope to sell a painting and thus procure money to marry the girl."

"If that is all that interferes," said the unscrupulous Crook, "we can manage. Art deal-

ers are always amenable to chicane. I will send word to every dealer in Göttingen to refuse his painting."

"A hint of competition is all I needed to arouse my enthusiasm," said the wicked Count. "Von Puff, have my pew in the church dusted out. I will go down to service on Sunday and see the girl personally. Come indoors, Professor, I want to show you my Ovid, an example of Aldus at his best. In pristine condition,—like some people we know of." With a foreboding chuckle the profligate Count led his guest into the castle.

Chapter

4

ERR VON PUFFENGRUNTZ, though lazy, could be active enough when his own comfort was concerned. He took care to go down to the church early on Sunday morning, to see that the Wolfenstein pew was ready for occupancy. The Count so rarely came to services that other members of the congregation had made a habit of borrowing the cushions and hassocks from his pew; the last time they were in church, at Christmas, Puffengruntz had been

forced to kneel on the bare stone flags. Neither his knees nor his prayers had improved by this.

The parson was quite agitated when he heard that Count Wolfenstein was coming. He had prepared for that morning a sermon on Satanism in High Places, and it was immediately necessary to strike out some of the stronger passages from his manuscript. Moreover it was the Sunday School prize day, and the good man felt it awkward that when the desirability of lowliness and self-control were to be expounded to the children, the questionable illustration of a wicked and worldly nobleman should be displayed to them in all its glamor. The perplexities of a virtuous parson were often severe under the feudal system.

Queerly enough, while the parson was hastily dusting the pews and thinking of politic

expediency, the saturnine Count was experiencing a flush of true spiritual feeling. Such paradoxes are frequent in a world whose bumper crop is irony.

The sweet strokes of the church bell were inundating the calm forenoon as Count Wolfenstein came down the steep hillside. That heavy beseeching vibration seemed to express all the humble hearty life of the village, its days of sun and labor in stony fields, its nights of storm and fear. Great winds and terrors passed over the splintered scarps of the mountain, but in its piny cleft the little hamlet knelt brave and pious. Its knees, sturdier than Puffengruntz's, were bent on bare rock. Dark apprehensive forests ridged above it, but louder than the sigh of the pine-boughs came the jolly ring of axe and saw. Wheelbarrows and beer-kegs trundled bumpily over the round cobbles of the market-

place, linen flapped in the wind or spread sunning on hedges. The pious simpletons and gossips, with no thought beyond toil and meat and shelter, were happier than the lonely Count who tortured his mind with meanings.

He knew this, and as he strode down the pinewood trail an unusual softness was in his heart. The agonizing yearning cry of the church bell smote upon his spirit. For a dreamy moment, among those parallels of turpentine fragrance, he was almost uncertain of his life of pride and pleasure, his vain researches and his anxious mirth. He was preceded by Puffengruntz, whose clumsy figure capered and skipped ludicrously on hazards of the slippery path. That ungainly form seemed to symbolize the ungraceful stupidity of the life of mere carnal mirth. He could see by the superintendent's air of import that he had been engaged in some conspiracy. More con-

genial to Count Wolfenstein were the grim full-bearded faces of his two mountaineer bodyguards, Wulfgar and Bruno. In leather jerkins and watchfully alert for danger these loyal ruffians always attended him, as savage as their own wolf-hounds. They carried blunderbusses and wore his wolf's-head emblem embroidered on their shoulders. No feudal landlord went abroad without protection, for there were always overburdened tenants who might have tried a musket-shot in the hope of delaying tax-payments. He gave the guards each a silver florin to put in the collection, and stationed them at the church door. He did not wish them in the pew with him, for his senses were delicate and those leather shirts smelled strong of the chase.

So his mind was sentimental and recipient as he took his place in the carved pew of honor. They were a little early; the villagers

already seated rose dutifully in respect, but it made him feel lonely. He was just a little weary of being the wicked Count Wolfenstein. He would have liked someone to call him by his first name. It is his tragedy that we do not even know what that name was.

The Count's pew was not in the nave, it was set crossways in an alcove of its own beside the chancel, and somewhat raised above the others so that his lordship could survey the whole church, without being too plainly seen himself. When the Count was seated, Puffengruntz handed him a prayer-book with the places carefully marked, for he knew his employer was not too familiar with the details of the ritual. And then there was a rustle at a side-door and Puffengruntz nudged the Count sharply. "There she is," he whispered. "She's coming in."

Sunday School was just over, and Amina,

who taught the youngest, was entering with her pupils. The Sunday School sat in the front pews, where they could join vigorously in the singing, and also be under the admonishing eye of the pastor. Preceded by sturdy bairns, all rosy and crisp in clean smocks and tight pigtails, she innocently marshalled her little troop, supervising a handkerchief here, a button there. Among that flock of sanguine childhood, reared on milk and sausage, scrubbed in cold mountain water, she seemed a little pale. She had not slept well; Rudolph had now been gone several days longer than he had foretold, and she had been troubled by strange dreams. Dame Barbara too had been mysterious, and amiable with a geniality which was disconcertingly unusual. This morning the old lady herself had laid out Amina's best things—the blue chambray dress, the white petticoat with four tiers of twirly

ruffle, the one-piece foundation-garment in the newest Göttingen mode for warm weather —and the girl had wondered a little. But her mind was too full of the morning's Sunday School lesson, and her anxiety for Rudolph, to brood on other matters. She might have been more surprised still if she had seen Dame Barbara exhume an ancient silk gown and monstrous farthingale from the chest in the attic. Rigged out in this balloon gear, like a yacht under spinnaker, exhaling herbs and camphor to the world, the scheming old shrew clicked over the cobbles. From the rear of the church she caught Von Puffengruntz's eye and they exchanged signals.

But the Count himself was aware of nothing but the pretty scene in the forward pew. As a group of children perched on the focsle of a ship might sail unsuspectingly into the vast changes of a breezy sky, so did that

churchload of simple parishioners steer head-on into the billowy weather of medieval theology. But those with whom we concern ourselves were untroubled by the Lutheran thunders. Bulwarked in innocence, like a blue hydrangea in a bed of daisies, Amina sat among her squirming charges. Her blonde head was hatless, in the country manner, and the thick braids coiled up for Sunday gave her unusual gravity. Absorbed in her own régime, probably she was the only one in the congregation unaware that his lordship was present. Her pupils, full of the energy of young milk-fed Teutons, were one continuous wriggle all down the bench. Kerchiefs were dropped, shoelaces came untied, illicit toys had to be impounded, glistening candies in full suck disjected from bulging cheeks. She stooped for a fallen prayer-book, and a surge of diving youngsters rucked up the wide soft skirt.

The Count, from his pew of vantage, saw a flash of white cotton stocking, a blue garter. For the first time in his life he felt philoprogenitive.

A hymn gathered up the energies of the young into shrill unison, and gave Amina a chance to collect herself. Her quick instinct perceived that something was different from usual. Then in the castle pew she saw the dark compelling face of the aristocrat. Heedless of all else he had not risen with the others for the hymn. He sat, fixing her with astonished concentration. She continued to sing, or thought she did, but a terror choked her throat. Then a warmth of blood, more knowing than herself, seemed to burst on her cheekbones and spread in shamed ardor on her golden-clear skin.

The parson, with a rapid readjustment of conscience which would carry him high in

ecclesiastical spirals, had revised his discourse into a consideration of the blessings and benefits of feudal tenure. But it was lost on the overlord himself; he was too mannerly to stare, but his mind dwelt on that face of maidenly dismay; even, in occasional parenthesis, on the blue garter. He saw in Amina the tender grace his lonely castle needed. More than in folios of Ovid or in bevies of feminine sophisters he saw here the spirit of creative innocence. He was an experienced casuist, quick to convert optatives to imperatives. After all, he said to himself, a roué makes the best husband. And she deserves the best. So, he thought, by one great stroke of wickedness he would make himself pure.

The Church, as usual, played into the hands of State. It came time for the Sunday School prize-giving. The parson, simpering with coincidence, announced to the congrega-

tion that he would now give himself the pleasure of inviting his lordship to confer the certificates of merit upon the winning scholars. With all his natural grace the Count did so. The children gaped and snivelled with excitement, but after they had been dispatched the Count saw his opportunity. His tall figure and dark face dominated the place from the chancel railing.

"But is there no certificate of merit, no symbol of appreciation," he said, "for the beautiful young mistress herself? Surely it is her sweet devotion that has qualified these innocents to take out their first papers in the citizenship of Heaven?"

The parson was a trifle piqued that he had not thought of this powerful metaphor. He stammered some reply to the purport that virtue is ever its own best consolation.

"Not always," said the Count. "Allow me

to remedy the deficiency." From his own bosom he unfastened the emerald brooch he wore, a glimmering gem carved in the likeness of a wolf's fierce head. He gave it to Amina who curtseyed low, overcome with amazement.

"For you, my dear," he said; and speaking kindly into her blushing ear he added, "Often what begins in embarrassment concludes in joy."

The parson was beginning to think this had gone far enough. Some of the churchwardens were looking perplexed, and Dame Barbara was evidently only waiting for Puffengruntz to come a little nearer so that she might swoon with emotion.

The Count raised Amina gently to her feet. He always knew how to take just one step at a time.

"Perhaps you would enjoy visiting us at

the castle some day?" he said kindly. "If I give a party, will you accompany me in the mazurka?"

Amina was terrified, but she would have been no girl for a heroine if she had not also been thrilled.

"Oh yes, your lordship," she replied, "if you don't drive too fast."

The simplicity of her answer completed his delight. The Count was wise enough to know that nothing is so rare and precious as genuine naïveté.

Puffengruntz was now within five feet, and Dame Barbara fainted in his direction with precise calculation, allowing three feet for the totter. But before losing consciousness she remarked: "Surely as good as a betrothal; there were witnesses."

Chapter 5

ALE dawn began to brighten the attic window. Birds in the shrubbery beside the white cascade broke into shrill multiples of argument, like a large family of children disputing precedence for the morning bath. The canary woke and bruised his wings against his cage of withy. It was smaller than he had dreamed during the night. Amina stirred uneasily in her bed. There were cold spots in it. It was larger than she had dreamed during the night.

She had been very unhappy. Still, after all these days, there was no news of Rudolph; she feared some disaster. After the episode at church, the fat and smirking Puffengruntz, whom she disliked, had paid an official call on Dame Barbara. The exact details of their colloquy Amina had not learned, but she overheard the chamberlain uttering jurisprudential terms in which a strong simplicity of meaning was evidently masked by a cloud of syllables. "According to Grafschaftsgericht and Oberlehnsherrlichkeit, *jus quod ad personas pertinet* includes *jus connubii*," Puffengruntz was saying; and he used other technicalities of feudal law which I hesitate to repeat, leaving them for such hardy works as Gneist: *Verfassungsgeschichte des Mittelalters*. After Puffengruntz had left the Dame appeared much excited and announced that they were to remove to the castle. The Count,

whose word was law, desired to make Amina a lady of high degree. With Dame Barbara as chaperone and Carline as maid-in-waiting, she was to live in luxury. Tutors and dressmakers were to be hired for her social improvement, and after a certain period of probation she was to become Countess of Wolfenstein.

But with all her simplicity, Amina had a feminine sapience. "What does he mean by probation?" she asked.

Dame Barbara, who imagined the life of the castle as a continuous round of night-club gaiety, pretended to be indignant.

"The life of Riley!" she exclaimed. "An opportunity to combine gallantry and chastity. Very rare in a feudal society."

"But I don't want to be feudal," said poor Amina, weeping on Carline's shoulder. "I only want Rudolph."

"Forget him," insisted the Dame. "He can paint your portrait after you're Countess of Wolfenstein. This is your one chance to rise in the world. Baggage, remember your station."

"Baggage should go to the freight station," said the flippant Carline, who was the soubrette type and enchanted at the prospect of being elevated to the castle.

But Amina was not happy. Her heart was fixed on a destiny more humble and discreet.

And now, as we implied above, came the dawn. This was the appointed morning when the Count and his retinue were coming to escort Amina to the castle. Under a fiction of charming deference and courtesy, she was being kidnapped just as surely as a Sabine girl. After a vigil of tears and anguished thought of Rudolph, not unlike the sort of

lonely night described for a warmer climate in the Song of Songs which is Solomon's, she had fallen into a troubled stupor.

First tides of morning twilight sifted over the mountain crest, darkness drained off into hollows and sluiced away down the river bottom. White birches glimmered in groups, joined at the toes like tall dancing girls holding a poise. The torrent of the watercourse softened from its darktime menace to the friendly bubbling voice of day. The lighting effect was intricate. If you were putting it on the stage you would call in the electrician and say, Blue footlights, one-quarter blur. Second, third and fourth borders, one-quarter blur. Water-ripple on the effect-machine (a sort of little stereopticon, run by a motor). Focus a 1000-watt pink spot on the mountain peak, from R 3, and a straw spot on Amina's window, from L 3. Have a blue spot ready

out front, to pick up Rudolph at his entrance. . . .

Yes! in that tender suffusion of tinted blurs (provided the stage hands get their money after the matinée on Saturday) a dark figure enters, looks warily about. It is Rudolph, footsore and haggard. Delayed and diddled in his errand by the machinations of the Crook (who sent word to the art dealers that the painting was not genuine) still he is here. He has tramped all night, impelled by love and foreboding. He claps his hands three times. Amina hears and springs from bed; the electrician is ready with the straw-colored spotlight. There is Amina at the window; her hair in pretty braids, her white bedgown shining in the first morning beam from L 3.

"Surely I heard his well-known signal? Hist! Who's there?"

The blue spot, tilted on the gallery rail,

catches Rudolph. He basks in it; he loves it; he has been out of the story now for several chapters.

"'Tis I—Rudolph."

"Rudolph!" (Accent of ecstasy.) "Hush, speak low. If my foster mother still sleeps I will join you."

Blue foots and borders come up to full, please, during the ensuing dialogue.

But we are not writing this for electricians.

In the joy of seeing him again, Amina forgot her trouble for a moment. All she could think was that he was there, her tall and serious-minded Rudolph. With his strong arms about her, what could go amiss? But why had he been gone so long?

"Ill fortune, Amina. The dealers in Göttingen would have nothing to do with my picture. I went from one end of the Weender-

strasse to the other. The fools made all sorts of excuses. They said my color was crude, my anatomy was all wrong—"

"Your anatomy, Rudolph? Why, I love your anatomy, I think it's perfect." She embraced it jealously.

"No, no, not my personal anatomy," said Rudolph a little peevishly. "As a matter of fact, *your* anatomy; in the picture, I mean."

"Well then, it's my fault, not yours," she cried generously. "It's because I wouldn't pose for you the way you wanted me to. Darling, I'm so sorry." Then a hopeful thought struck her. "But the canary—he's all right, isn't he?"

"Oh the canary's fine," said Rudolph bitterly. "A wonderful likeness. One dealer pretended to think he was a plate of scrambled eggs. They don't understand impressionism."

"Never mind, my genius-boy. Didn't you

tell me that Van Gogh and Penguin had the same trouble at first?"

"Not Penguin, Gauguin."

"I'm sorry. Did you bring the picture back with you?"

"I heard there was an American collector, a Doctor Rosenbach, staying at Cassel to buy works of art. I had only four florins, but I set out to meet him. After journeying five days I arrived at Cassel,* only to find that he had departed two days before to return to Philadelphia."

He sighed heavily.

"I left the painting with a remorseless agent, and here I am without a single guilder in my pocket. And what is more, if I fail to

* Charles M. Barras remains our source and authority in this fable, and we do not vary from his codex in essentials. It is less than 40 miles from Göttingen to Cassel; the time spent in the journey shows how an artist can be enfeebled by haggling with dealers.—*Editor.*

redeem my pledge at the end of two months, it is lost to me forever."

Even at such a sad moment, Amina showed her excellent good sense. The difficulties of life were maturing her rapidly.

"You should have sent it on to Doctor Rosenbach, carriage collect," she said. "Very likely he would have bought it rather than go to the trouble of returning it."

"I don't know his address."

"If he is so famous a collector, just Doctor Rosenbach, America, would reach him," she said sagely. "Never mind, we'll do another painting at once. This time I'll—"

Then she remembered. Certainly the future Countess would not be permitted, even in the warmest weather . . . Shaken with tears, she told him all that had happened.

"I supplicated, wept, remonstrated; but

you know, dear Rudolph, I am powerless. It is the Grafschaftsgericht."

The spirit of a true Rudolph boiled in young Werner's veins. Rudolphs are always impassioned: in our own day there have been Rudolph Valentino and Rudolph Vallée.

"By heaven, you shall not go. Were he twenty times more potent, I would oppose his power to the last!"

Their conversation was broken by Dame Barbara, who had overheard the painter's voice rising in anger. She sped out in dressing gown and curl papers, snatched Amina from her lover's arms, and berated them both. The old lady's point of view was strictly logical. Why should Amina's great social opportunity (and her own) be lost for the sake of a penniless dauber who even had to admit he had not yet sold his canvas.

To her copious indignation they had no

effective words to oppose. And then, by the well-timed irony of chance, as Amina melted in tears and Rudolph stood glowering, the sun lifted clear of the hills and flooded the valley with brilliance and a rush of merry voices and laughter came over the rustic bridge. The boys and girls of the village, headed by Carline, came frolicking to make dance and charivari in honor of the auspicious betrothal. Amina fled to dress, and Rudolph, powerless to avert the festive scene and unwilling to watch it, retreated sombrely up the glen to brood his sorrows. But Amina, before putting on her finery, sat at her maiden desk and hastily dashed off an appeal ingeniously addressed:—

An Wohlbekannten Herr Doktor
Kunst u. Buchsammler Rosenbach
Nordamerika.

Chapter
6

T is a privilege of fable to turn at its own impulse from joy to sorrow or back again; so we avert our minds from the woe of Rudolph lurking in the pine covert, and gaze upon the merry pattern of the dancers. In the jocund measures of old folk tunes and capers speaks the profoundest perfect joy: the strong ecstasy of blood and limb, triumphant assertion of mere physical continuance above doubtful sanitation and police. It is true that no medieval plague nor pillage

was as efficiently mortal as modern gasoline and alcohol; but the village of Wolfenstein did not foresee that, and had the good sense to be properly frightened of things it knew to be dangerous.

And what more triumphant assertion of life in its insistent fact than so irregular a betrothal? The lord of high places, who doubtless understood steep matters not revealed to common churls, had chosen to come down and honor a maiden of the village: what skilled it then whether by sacrament or seduction? Let old gammers quaver the head, gaffers whinny their jests; gaffer and gammer win in the end, for they pass soonest into peace and are quits. But in the meantime sun and balsam air are no distinguishers of doctrine. Dance rondo capriccioso!

So the boys drank a morning mug of beer in the arbor, and the girls swung in lines and

loops with their red and yellow dresses floating high, wide, and handsome. They laughed, pelted Amina's window with flowers, and sang the gaily aphrodisiac rhymes a lusty folk keeps in memory for such occasions. Von Puffengruntz, preceding the official party from the castle, was enchanted by the lively scene. As his rickety knees swivelled him down the last slope to the cottage garden, Dame Barbara, by good timing, emerged from her front door monstrously arrayed, and swept a notable curtsey.

The Count was a good stage manager. He had sent Von Puff ahead, not only to prepare himself an effective entrance but also because the chamberlain, though little esteemed in the village, had amid his lard a bacon streak of buffoon humor which was usually good for a laugh.

"Be covered, good people, be covered," he

remarked jocosely, since few of the men had troubled to salute him ceremoniously. "It is the true policy of greatness occasionally to waive a point of etiquette." Then, bowing to Dame Barbara:—

"I come, madam, by the Count's order, to announce that the cavalcade has arrived and is now resting on the plateau beyond the ravine. His lordship will be here at any moment, and in person conduct your fair foster daughter to her palfrey that waits, impatient for the honor to be mounted by her."

Mistress Barbara, who did not relish the idea of a climb in such tight stays, was hoping for a lift herself. This seemed an opportunity for a little coyness.

"And is there no palfrey impatient for the honor to be mounted by *me?*" she inquired.

"That shall be *my* privilege," said Von Puff.

The necessary laugh had thus been raised, and the Count (who had been waiting within earshot) entered with dignity, preceded by his Harz Mountain hoplites and followed by the wary and whiskered Wulfgar and Bruno. Von Puff, shouting "Room! Room for his lordship!" bustled about with such energy that he contrived almost alone to give the effect of a popular dēmonstration, and a scattering cheer rose among the hesitating peasants.

"Salutation to the good dame Barbara," said the Count, with praiseworthy gravity, though somewhat tingled by the risibilia of his prospective foster-mother-in-law's costume. "How fares your lovely charge?"

Dame Barbara, who would gladly have occupied the center of the stage as long as possible, said that Amina was well but nerv-

ous, expounding the neuro-physiological aspect of the situation in a manner that Dr. Joseph Collins could hardly have improved. For it is a great mistake to imagine (if anyone does) that a general notion of the acuities of "psychology" is entirely modern. As paradigm, she began some reminiscence of her own days of courtship. But the Count, who was a faithful reader of Montaigne and knew that those who have absorbed the appalling chapters of the Third Book need no further tuition, showed some impatience. To the regret of the assembled virguncules he broke in upon her. The excited old lady was just leading the bashful Amina from the cottage when the gathering was sharply interrupted.

Rudolph, drawing nearer and nearer in his agitation, could endure no longer. The frightened loveliness of his sweetheart in the

blue chambray dress (which he had not seen before) was too much. Bursting from behind the cottage he took Amina from her foster-mother. Then, leading her forward, he calmly faced his frowning rival and the astonished spectators:—

"My lord Count Wolfenstein, permit me, Rudolph Werner, a poor artist, to present to you Amina, a free maiden of this valley, and my affianced bride."

I confess that I like Rudolph for these spirited words, though they were an entire anachronism. Under the feudal system there was no such thing as a "free maiden." There was a murmur of amazement among all present. But though the villagers were Rudolph's friends, none dreamed of taking his side against the all-powerful Count. Indeed, such is the natural mischief of human beings, they had even felt a little malicious glee at the

news that Rudolph's romance was to be corrupted by the overlord; for Rudolph, by his absorption in painting, had come to be thought moody and immoral.

Count Wolfenstein never looked so feudal as when he was angry. His dark brows ran together into one crisp line and his sinewy hand stole lightly to the silver hilt of his rapier. He respected the youth's courage, and as a connoisseur he could not help secretly admiring the bonny couple as they stood before him: Rudolph with bright steady eyes and feet planted well apart; Amina, pale with alarm, clinging desperately to her lover. But a touch of opposition always roused the devil in him and he had his reputation as a villain to live up to. The ruffians Bruno and Wulfgar had come close beside him; the armed guards in the background, plated with metal, clinked reassuringly.

"Who is this madman?" asked the Count angrily.

Dame Barbara, in a social apoplexy, babbled something incoherent. Puffengruntz, who saw his careful arrangements wretchedly disrupt, hastily picked up the cue. "A madman!" he cried. "Mercy on us! Seize him, secure him; somebody, everybody."

In any moment of unstable chemistry Von Puff could always be counted upon to serve as catalytic. By mere physical fidget he was sure to create some precipitation. With shrill cries and gestures he set the whole group in motion. Rudolph, shaking off Amina, made a menacing advance upon the Count. Bruno and Wulfgar immediately seized the headstrong artist, Amina threw herself pleading at Wolfenstein's feet. There was a short fierce struggle, and for a moment Rudolph almost burst his captors' grip, managing to tread

heavily on Von Puff's gouty toe. The chamberlain, hopping in anguish, disregarded Dame Barbara's evident search for an embrace in which to swoon. The Count, remaining quite calm, courteously raised Amina from the ground and handed her to her foster-mother.

"His misfortune claims our pity," he remarked, after satisfying himself that the muscular young artist was well secured by the two hairy minions. "Let some of his friends conduct him hence."

Caspar, a particular crony of Rudolph's, ran forward from the group of frightened villagers.

"Rudolph," he whispered, "are you mad to brave the tiger in his lair? This is neither the time nor the place to right your wrongs. Come with me."

"Release him," said the Count, making

popular capital of a safe situation, as a shrewd politician should.

The crowd applauded, and Bruno and Wulfgar threw their prisoner roughly to the ground. Shaken by the tussle, Rudolph allowed himself to be led away. The Count, seemingly passing over the incident as of no moment, whispered some instructions in Wulfgar's ear. Then, advancing smiling to Amina, he saluted gracefully and offered his hand. The agitated Puffengruntz caught his master's eye.

"Let the procession move," he cried.

The dancing girls, picking up their chains of flowers, formed in double file; the men in the background waved their broad hats and their empty mugs. Amina, tearfully leaning on the Count's arm, passed under a tunnel of garlands; Dame Barbara followed, escorted by Von Puff who still limped a little. Car-

line carried the canary. The men at arms fell in line, the party passed up the slope, over the bridge and toward the horses that waited to carry them to the foot of the mountain stair. But even in this moment so strangely mingled of honor and dismay Amina's presence of mind did not forsake her. In the blue chambray bosom she felt the papery crinkle of the letter she had written, and besought the Count to let her stop a minute at the village post-office. He agreed with tender complaisance, supposing it the usual childish desire to celebrate a journey by sending off a few picture postcards.

How pretty a curtain—as Charles M. Barras or any other old trouper would know by instinct—how pretty a curtain for a First Act. Good shamed and Evil triumphant; a graceful infusion of color and music, tresses of tossing hair, short red skirts, long white

stockings; beards for villainy and beauty for virtue. And just a gentle intimation of uncertainties held in suspense. So I want you to hear and savor the echo of their song as they fade away into the wooded slopes beyond the village,

> "Hark the birds with tuneful voices
> Vocal for our lady fair
> And the lips of opening flowers
> Breathe their incense on the air."

Rudolph, walking alone and bitter in the evergreen aisles, heard it too, and plunged deeper into the wilderness to blot the sound from his ears. He sat down miserably on a stump to consider his wretchedness. He did not guess that he had been followed. Set a fief to catch a fief was the Count's feudal motto, and Wolfenstein had instructed Bruno and Wulfgar to trail the reckless young lover. The two ruffians, whose full-bearded faces

blended well with the mossy forest foliage, were able to come behind him unobserved. According to the delightful and rigorous traditions of old romantic drama, Rudolph was not content to be alone and wretched, he must pour out the expression of his solitude. Some heroes, left alone with a stump, would make a speech; Rudolph sang a song. He was singing *I'm Alone*, lovely but fatal old ditty, and a paradox, for he was never less alone than at that moment. Even as he poured forth his profuse strains, Bruno and Wulfgar were crouched behind him. By an old sack thrown over his head and a cord to truss him up he was helpless in an instant. And about the same time that Amina and Carline and Dame Barbara were being shown to their luxurious chambers in the castle, poor Rudolph, unknown to them, was dumped into the dungeon beneath the Eastern wing. As he lay

there he could hear the festal merriment far above celebrating Amina's arrival, and Bruno and Wulfgar, coarse fellows, singing a Harz Mountain catch in the guardroom near-by.

Chapter 7

REPPO, the Black Crook's jack-of-all-work, used to think it sad that he, so naturally gifted with a sense of fun, should encounter so much grievance in the daily business of his life. In visits to the village or in his rare meetings with wandering foresters, his naïve absurdity was a joy to all. But as many a humble comedian has found, the very qualities which made his casual and external relations agreeably droll were a sorrow in his central and wage-earning

existence. Certainly as a sorcerer's factotum he led an uneasy career. Professor Herzog was undoubtedly a very learned man. When Greppo called at the Wolfenstein post-office for the mail he was duly impressed by the bundles of learned periodicals that arrived for his employer. He had grown to recognize the *Hibbert Journal*, the *Wochenschrift des Alchemismus*, the *Manchester Guardian*, *The Publishers' Weekly*, the *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association;* most of all *La Vie Parisienne*, which he once carefully extracted from its wrapper and looked over before delivering. The text of that jocund hebdomadary was impossible to him, but its illustrations are the most perfect example of a universal language: a cosmorama, an esperanto, understandable by men of any race or station. Unfortunately the professor observed Greppo's warm finger-prints on some

of the bathing pictures, which meant another beating.

For the Black Crook's high standing in the world of science did not make him a pleasant employer. He was alternately morose and facetious. He forgot that he had originally hired Greppo as an illustration of Natural Man, Man in the Unimproved State, and belabored the poor clown for his clumsy and creditable simplicities. He kept Greppo continuously busy on incomprehensible errands and labors; meals were irregular and scant; the professor would sit half the night reading books, and then issue forth into a thunderstorm to study the phenomena of lightning. He had contrived a dynamo-machine which by grinding a handle conveyed tingling spasms of shock; this he repeatedly tested on Greppo's ticklish person, to the victim's dismay. When Greppo yelped the professor

only turned the handle faster, noted his reactions on a graph, and remarked "Das wird der Haar auf die Brust wachsen lassen."

Greppo did not have a scientific mind, and it is probable that he did not duly appreciate his privileges in sharing the intimacy of experiments which might prove of great value to later generations. Also we have these reminiscences on Greppo's testimony alone; how far his ignorant witness is trustworthy I cannot estimate. It appears however that not all Professor Herzog's researches were of a philosophic sort. There were evenings when he put aside books and busied himself in his laboratory with retorts and alembics of unusual shape. In the ravine not far away was a curious glistening cave where ice formations lingered even until midsummer. Thither the scientist would send Greppo to fill a bucket with chips of frost. Before the anxious eyes

of his servant the Crook would then mix and agitate these icicles with aromatic herbs and fluids, and ultimately pour out a tawny potion which he called jocularly Uralterthums Elixir or (more familiarly) Das Altmodisches. On such occasions the austerity of the sorcerer was somewhat relaxed. He even allowed Greppo a taste of the drug, which was chill, sweet, and seemed to hasten like a Papal nuncio to the very throne itself. Like all magical draughts it was a paradox in action: in spite of its extreme frigor it coursed the veins with glamorous warmth. Greppo, happy to see the alchemist so genial, once watched in admiration while his master downed three beakers of this vivacious vodka. The saturnine savant apparently had a vision of the future of his invention.

"This goes to the right spot," he said, beaming dangerously upon his awe-struck

acolyte. "In fact, to all the right spots there are. But I shall destroy the formula. It must remain merely nuncupative. Do you understand me, varlet? I say nuncupative."

Greppo hastened to convey assent without attempted repetition.

"It shall remain a hearsay, a legend, a mere undulation in the great ocean of rumor. This elixir, like all the great hermetic secrecies, is too beautiful and strong for imperfect humanity. Humanity is sottish."

He paused, and removed his velvet cloak, for the evening seemed to have grown warmer. He appeared puzzled.

"Did I say sottish, or schottische?" he inquired.

Greppo, with his fantastic honesty, was bound to admit that the *sch* sound had predominated.

"Very well then," said the cheerful Crook,

"I must have meant it. Come, we will dance the schottische, for the sake of humanity."

He advanced upon his agitated minion, evidently planning some species of saltarello, but a deep chair happened to be adjacent and it swallowed him up.

"This Altmodisches is the true split infinitive," he said presently. "Greppo, what is the infinitive? You are silent, you are embarrassed, you make no reply. It expresses the idea of verbality without limiting it by reference to any express subject. Sein, oder nicht sein, as the great barbarian poet has remarked. Pure infinitive. And this elixir splits the pure infinitive by conveying to the intellect the verbal idea both active and passive at once. See, my mind is active but my legs are passive. Simultaneously, to drink and to be drunk. Gespaltete Infinitiv!"

He cackled with laughter, and Greppo

courteously laughed too, but without fervor. He knew that these gamesome moods were followed by extra severity; besides he had not had the advantage of a triple infusion.

"Above all," continued the professor, "Count Wolfenstein must never be admitted to the secret of this tipple. If he got hold of it, he would slide the whole castle over the cliff. No, this invention must perish with me. Qualis artifex pereo! I have a vision of future generations, unworthy of this hazardous essence, that shall rediscover it and perhaps take liberties with it. What havoc! Caveat potator!"

"You're right, professor," said Greppo, anxious to please. "Potaters are fine grub."

But the alchemist's mind was far beyond. "Sometimes the future of humanity disturbs me," he said sadly. "Pass me the goblet: I believe it contains a small codicil. . . ." He

fell gently asleep before the glass reached him, and the wondering assistant was able to finish off what was left in the vessel.

As far as I can gather, Professor Herzog in his researches had accidentally anticipated the composition of the Old-fashioned Cocktail. By his selfish secrecy in the matter he delayed its discovery for a couple of centuries. No wonder his memory is deplored.

The strange episode we now describe has to be woven together from Greppo's incoherent descriptions. I gather that it was the evening of the same day on which Amina had been escorted to the castle; by ill hap so sweet a morning had been followed by a night of foul weather. The professor had been agitated all afternoon; he had refused an invitation to attend the festivities at the schloss, which had disappointed Greppo, for on those

occasions the esurient drudge fed well in the servants' hall. Heavy thunder and rain stormed across the Brocken, there was the scream of savage gusts booming down the valley, and the big window at the back of the laboratory was frequently seamed by a bright fork of lightning. The professor, in an evil and foreboding humor, sat at his worktable endlessly turning over huge leather-encased volumes, apparently searching for some reference. Greppo had been anxiously blowing up the fire in the chemical furnace and nervously watching his employer. Electrical storms, which always terrified the clownish fellow, seemed specially stimulating to the old sorcerer. At last the Crook closed a great book with a bang of frustration.

"Vain, vain!" he ejaculated sombrely.

"Why don't you try the Brooklyn Directory?" said a voice, which did nothing to

allay the Crook's ill temper. He looked viciously at Greppo but the weary hireling had fallen asleep at the bellows. It was not he who had spoken but some wag in the audience.

The Crook prodded up his assistant. In spite of the latter's frightened protest the professor commanded his cloak and staff and bade Greppo bring the brazen casket (in which were kept certain magic spells and pyrotechnic chemicals).

"Whither go we, dread master?" stammered Greppo.

"To the Serpents' Glen."

Greppo's alarm was reasonable. The Serpents' Glen, that stricken and stony defile through which Rudolph had travelled with his painting, was sinister enough by day. At night, and in such weather, it was a place aghast. There, amid the hideous flares of tempest and the black spectres of cadaver trees,

evil demons of the mountain were supposed to hold carnival. Even in his wildest midnight sallies the Crook had never visited this grim region.

"Hark how the tempest howls," cried poor Greppo.

"Merely unequal atmospheric pressures readjusting themselves," said the Crook angrily. "A gale that did *not* howl would be unnatural indeed. Pick up the casket and follow."

Greppo attempted to obey. He tottered across the room, but as the Crook turned the knob a great gust of storm drove in the door, an artery of lightning veined the night with lilac, and the sky rent over them in a ripping crash. Greppo's legs diluted with terror. He fell on his knees yammering appeal.

"Master," he wailed, "my infinitive is

split. My mind is active but my legs are passive."

The Crook was rather pleased that the ignorant varlet had remembered the doctrine of the Altmodisches. To give the poor wretch strength to carry on he contemptuously poured out for him a tall glass of stimulant. This may have had some effect on Greppo's subsequent account of what happened.

They reached the Glen in safety: the Crook trudging ahead with his staff, Greppo ensuing miserably with the heavy casket and shuddering at each flurry of the storm. We have spoken earlier of the dead trunk of a great larch tree with outflung branches of weird lineament. When they came thither, the gale seemed to fall strangely still. Below that giant tree, on a level terrace, was a curious cairn of rocks which might almost have been placed as a rude altar. Here the Crook

ordered the casket set down, and commanded his knave to seek fuel.

"But, master," objected Greppo, "all is wet from the storm."

"The dead branches of yon blasted larch will serve."

In moments of extreme fright Greppo's tongue was subject to a kind of palsied spoonerism, excessively irritating to the Professor.

"Bastard larch?" he cried in panic.

The Crook struck furiously at him with his staff, and Greppo ran to find what twigs he could. He swears that in that moment he saw what he describes as a bull-raven, a gigantic dark fowl, wink red eyes at him from the limb of the dead tree and glimpsed a horrid face, shining with sultry lustre, peeping from behind the trunk. He flew in horror to gather broken fragments of firewood from a sheltered ledge. When he returned there

was already a flame alight on the stone altar.

"How came we by a flame?" he asked himself. "I'm sure I brought no tinder-box."

Greppo's description of what followed is difficult to credit. He says that when commanded to pluck an inner leaf from an adder plant, the bush parted disclosing a misshapen scarlet imp grinning at him. When he opened the casket to take out a green phial, a flash of fire shone forth. Startled by this he leaped back, and stumbling sat on a rock which ignited under him with another hot burst of flame. He rubbed his posteriors vigorously, announcing anxiously, "They're toasted."

"Knave, begone!" said the Crook. "Thy presence mars my work."

Greppo fled, and gladly. But he was afraid to go too far alone, and watching aghast from the cover of the forest he says he saw Herzog draw cabalistic figures on the ground and

hold converse with the powers of ill. And then, after a hellish incantation, with powders of different colors cast into the altar fire, there was a fearful peal of thunder, the wizened tree opened, and Zamiel, supreme spirit of mischief, emerged in a flamboyance of red light.

Greppo does not pretend to have understood the dialogue very well, particularly as it was carried on in a sort of pseudo-Shakespearean blank verse as bastard as the larch. But his impression is that the Black Crook, feeling old age and a life of dull virtue creeping upon him, entered into a compact with the Prince of Darkness. In return for the gift of prolonged life and malefic vigor, the Professor offered to win fresh souls to evil. Zamiel's stipulation, uttered in a magnificent tenor cantata which thrilled even the apprehensive Greppo, was that one year of

additional life would be granted to Herzog for each new soul that he proselyted to wickedness.

Obviously, if those were the terms, it was an unfair bargain. To win a lively soul wholly and irrevocably to unmitigated Evil probably takes more than a year, even of the busiest solicitation. But Zamiel, magnificent figure in infernal scarlet, had the sound theory that an offer is more winning if put in meter and music. His contract with the Black Crook he uttered as follows:—

Infernal accountant and banker am I:
The annual cycle of months as they fly
Must dividends show on this audit of mine—
Yea, souls with percentage much larger than thine.
For though it sound cruel,
My flames must have fuel,
I call for souls younger and whiter than thine.

For every damnation accrued to my store
I grant thee commission to live a year more,

So harvest a hundred, a century whole
I add to thy lifetime, Oh pitiful mole!
Then make up hell's budget
And I shall not grudge it,
Prolonging forever thy shivering soul!

But if by the midnight, twelve months from today
Some life to perdition you fail to betray—
If, wrung by dishonor, no ghost comes to tell
Of horror and shame that you wrought by your spell
Be *thou* the poor token
Of Satan's bond broken
And forfeit thyself in this Compact of Hell!

And Greppo, listening with chills scalloped up and down his back, heard the Crook say in a deep voice, "I hear, dread master, and thy will obey." He makes further muddled report of sulphur fumes steaming from a crevice in the earth, demons rising with a brimstone Domesday Book which emitted sparks as the professor signed it, and a wild

rally of half-seen ghosts, spectres, vampire bats and forms of corruption which glowed with poison colors in the dusky air. Down the rocky slopes of the glen resounded Zamiel's last words:—

"Within a dungeon of the Eastern wing of gray and gloomy Wolfenstein there lies in chains a youth called Rudolph. His fortune's desperate, and desperate souls like drowning men will clutch at straws. Begin with him!"

But ere this Greppo was flying wildly down the homeward path. He was resolved to quit the Black Crook's service at the earliest opportunity.

Chapter
8

THE cunning Count was too shrewd to press his attentions on Amina with unmannerly zeal. She was not, like Dame Barbara, a vulgar soul immediately debauched by the glamor of wealth and power. Wolfenstein was content to begin by attempting to divert her; by surrounding her with every comfort and pleasure, hoping that time would cause her to forget her girlish attachment to the young artist. He knew too that in the grasping old foster-mother and

the sprightly Carline he had powerful allies. Their continued promotion to the life of the castle depended on Amina's eventual assent to his desires. They might well be relied on to cajole her toward the primrose path.

Also he well understood what influence luxurious plumbing has on the feminine soul. For the first time Amina had a bathroom of her own, with porcelain tub and glass-enclosed shower and even some rather frisky frescoes of a Watteau type. The shower was a puzzle to her, and at first she thought it a sinister device to put her out of the way. For several days she was complimented on a ruddy glow of health and happiness which was in reality due to having turned the Hot handle by mistake.

Yet Amina, with all her simplicity and her love of fun, was no soft seceder. The storm

that swept the Brocken and its neighboring peak (a height of gently mammal outline, named the Venusberg) seemed ominous of impended woe. Lightning blazed, the tall casements shivered, the wolfhounds kennelled in the castle yard yowled horribly. Amina in her great stone-paved bedchamber, under the gloomy tester canopy of crimson damask, was homesick for the familiar attic and took the canary to bed with her for comfort. She thought desolately of Rudolph, and would almost have been relieved if she could have known him secure in the dungeon a hundred feet below.

But Dame Barbara and Carline were in rare spirits; though in her grotesque vanity the Dame thought that the room assigned to her, at the rear of the castle, was not sufficiently august for her dignity as prospective mother-in-law. She knew the impression she had

made on the amorous Puffengruntz, and when she and Carline met the chamberlain on the terrace after breakfast she did not scruple to broach the topic. I fear that both Barbara and Von Puff were low-comedy types, and as conscientious historian I confess I find their dialogue unedifying.

"Good morning, madam," said Von Puff cheerily. "And Fräulein Carline! I trust you rested well in your new quarters."

"Quarters, indeed!" retorted the Dame. "What you gave me were hindquarters."

Von Puff was taken aback. "Surely you exaggerate," he said with a hardworking smirk. "Nay, madam, if the castle seems a trifle primitive, remember it is a remarkable example of middle-aged Gothic."

So are they both, thought Carline to herself.

"I was greatly disturbed by your savage

hounds," said the old lady. "Do you feed them at midnight? All night long they were whining and dining, howling under my window."

"Their provocation must have been great, madam," observed Von Puff slyly. "Perhaps you forgot to pull down the blind.—I gave you that chamber because it commands the best view of the mountain."

"I don't want to look at the mountain," she said irritably.

"But surely, the Venusberg!" insisted Von Puff; adding (aside) to Carline, "Just a little pique.—But if you prefer, come with me and we will choose a room together."

The old lady's remarks, as the intuitive reader will have observed, were not so much complaints as a form of anile coquetry; of which the above is surely a sufficient illustration.

The Count's domestic staff was admirably adapted to afford entertainment to his guests. As Carline smartly remarked, the serving wenches were chosen for qualities quite other than their housewifely agility. There were a dozen upstairs maids whom Puffengruntz had drilled into a quite creditable corps de ballet; at dusk they put off the régime of chamber-work and became a sort of musical comedy company. The men-at-arms, like all German peasantry, could do well at simple glees and choruses, the Count himself was lively on a harpsichord, and Bruno and Wulfgar made a tolerable comedy duo. In those simple days there was no Chorus Equity Association to restrain the domineering Count from exacting these additional services from his retainers; in fact they enjoyed them. Carline now discovered a charming talent as singer and danseuse. To Von Puff's great delight

she taught his troupe new songs, such as *Georgie* (for which he served as foil, sawing on the bull-fiddle) and instructed the limber chambermaids in the evolutions of *Fascinating Little Man.* Amina, somewhat tactlessly, would never sing anything but the sweetly plaintive monody of *I'm Alone,* which Rudolph had taught her.

So hardly an evening went by without doings of some sort. The Count exercised all his arts to charm and entertain. There were dancing, pencil and paper games, anagrams, music. Carline sang, Von Puff recited *The Face on the Barroom Floor,* and the chambermaids did all that 24 legs could reasonably be expected to provide in the way of flourishes and ruffles. The Count himself, after a few goblets of wine, would sometimes sing, and arranged a quartet for song and dance, briskly rendered by himself with the chamberlain,

Dame Barbara, and Carline. This was handsomely applauded by the whole household, and the lyric the Count wrote for it is even of some scholarly importance as it foreshadowed the eventual break-up of the Germanic feudal system and the dawn of modern feminist culture. One verse ran so:—

> And when I marry Amina
> I won't do what I used,
> For customs feudal
> Are apple strudel
> And She will rule the roost.

I like to think that this shows Count Wolfenstein in his brighter side: a man of evil deeds no doubt, but with promising transfusions of liberalism.

Many a woman would doubtless have succumbed without demur to so complex and ingenious a wooer; in fact many did; but Amina remained disappointingly steadfast. He used

to call her, sadly, his Adamant Eve. She was always charming and friendly; she moved with good grace through all the pattern of that highly-colored life, grateful and demure, but with the aloofness of a guest and more puzzled than amused. She had no genius for frivolity, and she bolted her chamber door at night.

Meanwhile Rudolph lay in pawn in the basement. The wicked Count was holding him in reserve. Mocked by the coarse jibes of Bruno and Wulfgar, meanly rationed, and chained in a gloomy cell, he was despondent. His bushy jailers taunted him with exaggerated report of frolic parties up above. At first, like a hardy wight, he met their sneers with equal retort: he called them the Smith Brothers. But his spirit, always inclined to solemnity, was undermined by the acids of de-

spair. "How awful is the chill of this noxious vault," he said.

If he had been allowed to paint pictures on the walls of his dungeon he would have felt that he was getting even with his oppressor, but the Count (whose taste in murals was very precise) had given strict orders that no graphic materials should on any account be left within his reach.

To Rudolph in this mood of depression, appeared the Black Crook. The sorcerer, flushed by his compact with the fiend Zamiel, did not hesitate to outwit even his old crony the Count. Unseen by Wulfgar and Bruno, the professor (followed by the unhappy Greppo) made his way secretly through the wine cellars, which he knew well, and into the dungeon by a postern panel. He had meditated long on the best means to cozen the desperate painter to his foul design. To a

needy artist, the professor believed, a promise of unlimited cash would be prevalent.

Rudolph's salutation was inhospitable. "Ill-omened bird, what brings you here?" he said.

The Crook, with his unrivalled knowledge of psychology, began by touching Rudolph in his most generous feelings.

"Thou lov'st a maid of whom thou hast been robbed," he said. "Wouldst win her back? I have the power to aid thee."

Rudolph was suspicious.

"Men say you deal in dark and necromantic spells," he returned cautiously.

"Fools sneer the most when least they understand," replied the Crook. And with a wave of his staff he caused the prisoner's fetters to fall from his wrists. Then, as Rudolph strode to and fro to start the blood in his cramped limbs, the tempter continued his

work. He expounded the old legend of a mysterious treasure-hoard concealed in a cavern near a mountain lake, and said that he knew the secret of it.

At first Rudolph's stout heart spurned the suggestion, as proudly as he would have rejected an offer to do comic strips for a newspaper syndicate.

"Thou'ldst work some juggle to entrap my soul!" he cried fiercely. "Begone, I say; begone!"

But Herzog was crafty. He played not only on the misery of the prisoner but on the sentiment of the lover. He described Amina as helpless and likely to yield to the abominable seductions of the patrician scoundrel.

"She'll take the Count," he warned. "She is but woman and she may be won. Already flattered by his serpent's tongue, she dries her tears and listens to his suit." So vivid was

his slander, so impressive his iambic pentameter line, poor Rudolph almost seemed to see through the walls of his dungeon a vision of his darling in the lickerish arms of the ravisher.

Stung to madness the youth listened to the Crook's instructions. The professor gave him a pocket compass, and bearings for reaching the concealed grotto, which could only be approached by boat. What he did not tell Rudolph was that at the entrance to this underground water-cavern was a dangerous whirlpool, fatal hitherto to all explorers. And in the desire of getting rid of Greppo at the same time, he ordered his bewildered servant to accompany the artist.

Another wave of the Black Crook's magic staff and the grated prison door swung open. A shaft of rich golden light, a whole thousand watts of it, poured like a pathway of promise

into the gloomy place. Dazzled and wondering, obeying the sorcerer's gesture, Rudolph and the gaping Greppo stepped into that shining glow and departed to seek their fortune. The Black Crook laughed wickedly in the shadows—

> The lust of gold is rising in his soul,
> The path he follows ends in death.
> He's mine, ha, ha (*Hisses*)
> He's mine!

Chapter

9

REPPO was much pleased to find himself in the service of so friendly a master as Rudolph. He leaped and skipped hilariously as they scrambled away from the dangerous castle. The Black Crook, further to seduce the artist, had pressed on him a purse of money, so the hungry pair paused at the inn for Wiener schnitzel and a seidel. Then, without waiting to answer the landlord's many questions (for there had been much scandal in the village) they pressed on, fol-

lowing the sorcerer's directions for finding the treasure.

We see them again in a bouldered notch in the mountains, a strange gnarled crevice dappled with bright glare and black shadows. They were now approaching the ill-famed lake, and Rudolph halted to consider the pictorial values of the scene.

"There's a remarkable chiaroscuro here," he said pensively.

Greppo started back. "Don't encourage it," he exclaimed. "I'm scared of snakes."

Rudolph smiled at his companion's simplicity and clapped him on the back. "I think we draw near our destination," he said.

Greppo agreed. "Just now I heard a bittern cry, and twice ere that I heard a marsh-frog croak, and as they're both ambiguous, 'twere safe to say we're near the Ferry."

Greppo did not mean ambiguous, he meant

amphibious, which was a word he had heard Professor Herzog use; but Rudolph was too sentimental to correct him.

"Aye, good Greppo," he mused. "The fortune we seek lies across that water. Fortune, and woman's love."

"Then let's seidel over," cried Greppo. "Oh master, this is so congenial. After cudgelings and short rations I do feel gratified."

Rudolph considered the comedian's chubby form.

"Thy cheerful sanguine face shows no marks of misery," he said.

"It wasn't my face that was exposed to it."

Greppo would fain have paused here, to sing an old madrigal (*The Strap That Mother Used To Fan My Pants*) which seemed to cue in appropriately; but Rudolph was impatient. They went on toward the lake,

to search for a concealed shallop the Black Crook had mentioned.

Now we must, however inadequately, allude to the unique geological formation where Stalacta, benignant spirit of that region, had set up a sort of feminist encampment. Stalacta, a Harz Mountain Hypatia, patroness of arts and virtues and a thinker in advance of her time, had established in this unusual place a primitive chautauqua or Summer School. Except Dragonfin, a contortionist acrobat of greenish and batrachian appearance (who served as Life Guard, swimming instructor, and teacher of gymnastics), there were no men in the gathering, but plenty of fairies. Dragonfin, a creature of sturdy humor, described Stalacta's protégées as Unitarians because they all wore one-piece bathing suits. They spent the summer in literary

and athletic exercises in the cool privacy of their shimmering retreat.

The best authority for this scenic marvel must be Charles M. Barras himself. He described it as:—

> The Grotto of Golden Stalactites. A grand and comprehensive water cavern of gold, deeply perspective with stalactiform arched roof, cut wings running parallel and harmonizing with the main grotto, the mouth of which (5 feet high by 5 feet wide) discloses an open lake and distant shore. At back, transparent silver water in which are seen sporting fish. Diminutive fairies asleep on the walls of the grotto in golden shells, shore richly studded with gold and jewels. Set masses of emerald and gold R, L, and C, upon and at the foot of which are reclining gnomes and amphibia. Fairies asleep in poses R and L.

To these enchantments must be added a Throckmortonian waterfall, pouring steadily and with aquamarine translucence over the rocky background.

The girls of Stalactite Camp were enjoying the pearly afternoon. Weary with swimming and sunburn (which by the exiguity of their bathing suits was almost total in extent) they lay about in delicious attitudes upon the level sand of the vast cavern, where the clear water flowed in under the shelter of the mineral roof. Legend has not erred, for uncountable treasure sparkled in veins of gem and crystal ribbing the stony antre, in coral growths, pearly shells, amber and carnelian fragments. But Stalacta and her nymphs considered these merely as amusing toys; their minds, with the strong intellectuality of women, were devoted to higher matters. Like Tennyson's Princess, like a Ph.D. from Bryn Mawr, Stalacta had

formed a vision of a feminine phalanstery serene and cerebral, exempt from the brutal comedy of man's civilization. With music, eurhythmic exercises, swimming, Girl Scout cookery, and lectures on the fundamentals of literary appreciation, the campers were kept hale and busy. There was even a vein of mild skittishness in some of their frolics, but quickly allayed by the amateur performance of one-act plays of the Celtic Revival. Fees paid by a number of wealthy American girls (among whom Stalacta's dude-ranch had become quite fashionable) were sufficient to cover running expenses. The one-piece bathing suits, glimpsed by the prudish local peasantry, accounted for legends of superstitious horror which kept the place private. And the whirling eddy in front of the cavern entrance, where the lake water gurgitated to a subterranean sluice, like an unplugged bathtub, was

dangerous enough to keep away casual fishermen and peepers.

Today was Stalacta's birthday and there were to be doughnuts for supper. Queenly figure in the full curve of biological prime, with a floating beach-robe over her silk swimming suit, she came up the shore from bathing, singing her favorite anthem *The Power of Love*. Her pupils, in affectionate and admiring mood, joined in the chorus so that the hollow grot resounded with clear tones, while Dragonfin turned supple cartwheels and handsprings. But he was anxious at heart, for he had seen an ominous red flush on the rising moon. In a camp full of sentimental girls the moon has to be watched carefully.

He mentioned it to Stalacta, and she looked grave; but with her splendid self-command she put the thought aside.

"Let no thought other than of joy mingle

with this happy time," she said. "Remember, 'tis my natal hour. Let the invisible harmonies of this our realm breathe sweetest concord only."

She called upon her Girl Scout troop to do their particular drill which was a favorite in all the camp entertainments. Twelve of the most buxom girls, nicknamed the Amazons, were called forth one by one in rhyming summons. Stalacta had composed the rhymes herself, for her lofty intellect knew how to unbend when desirable in genteel trifling. The couplets were in each case suited to the character of the individual, and as each girl blushingly stood out and struck a pose the others cheered with innocent mirth. Stalacta, herself of robust proportion, had no patience with epicene figures; her Amazons were chosen for full haunch and bust, and appeared in a crescendo of amplitude.

Twelve maidens of our special guard I call
(Stalacta recited)
That none may interrupt our festival.
My Amazons of innocence, arise
To be our rampart against prying eyes:
Rise, in our underworld all free from sin
And let our revelry begin!

Scintilla, little spark—a soul of flame
Whose ardent spirit well deserves the name.

Sapphira, essence of the lake's pure blue,
Most intellectual of our retinue.

Aquamarine, like moonlight on the mere,—
Particularly skilful with a spear.

Amethystine, gracious, gay, and simple;
But see the mischief lurking in her dimple.

Jadina, dryad of the forest glade,
Armed in maidenhood, and unafraid.

Rubyblossom—exquisite physique—
Is beautiful; and also, she reads Greek.

Topaz, golden nymph no grief can quench:
Her temperament is just a trifle French.

Amber, cast up by the salt sea's foam,
Here in our grotto finds herself at home.

Emeraldine, by fairy swains pursued,
Knows the embarrassments of pulchritude.

Turquoise, amplest of our lovely swarm,
Generous in nature as in form.

Cool *Crystalline*, disdainful to a wooer,
Seems transparent, but you can't see through her.

Last, lovely *Coralbud*, on thee I call—
On thee, the most impressive of us all!

Coralbud, a really gigantic maiden, gathered her sister Amazons about her, and they retorted with a gladsome ditty, *We Sing Because We Love To Sing*, encored with another favorite, *Where Shall the Baby's Dimple Be, Cheek or Chin or Knuckle or Knee?* Then the gnomes, fairies and amphibia joined

Dragonfin in tumbling and gymnastic games and fun was at its height when Dragonfin showed signs of alarm. Strangers were approaching the mouth of the cavern.

"Two daring mortals, sent hither by the Black Crook," Dragonfin announced. "They come to despoil our realm of its glittering wealth."

"Fear not; they will perish in the white whirlpool," said Stalacta calmly, with the detachment of a Pallas Athene.

Looking out through the blue archway of the cave they could indeed see the tiny boat nearing across the level water, one small figure pulling at the oars, one in the stern. But as the craft came into the suction of the current, and the two occupants began to realize their peril, a sigh of distress arose from the watching nymphs. Emancipated and intellectual and Greek-readers as they were, there

was yet a thrill of strange interest in seeing two men (and one evidently handsome) on the horizon of their feminine Eden.

"Who may these rash intruders be?" Stalacta asked Dragonfin, who had climbed a rocky jut to see more clearly.

"Greppo, the Black Crook's henchman, and the young artist Rudolph," said Dragonfin, who evidently knew them by sight. He must have seen them on some of his weekly visits to the village to replenish the camp's supply of marshmallows and sunburn lotion.

On hearing the name of Rudolph, Stalacta showed unusual agitation. "Fly, Dragonfin, rescue them and bring them hither," she cried.

The girls all wondered. Why should their austere principal be so concerned by the fate of a mere man?

Already the little punt was helpless in the

pull of the stream. The tender spectators were filled with pity and awe. They could see Greppo trying furiously to row out of the quickening strength of the current, and Rudolph paddling manfully with the steering oar. But too late. The boat began to circle slowly in the coiling water, then spun wildly, tilted downward into the vortex, and disappeared.

The sympathetic girls wrung their hands, hid their faces in distress. Stalacta turned away in silent grief.

But Dragonfin, mighty swimmer, more frog than man, had dived deep into the whirling water. He alone knew the twisted currents of those green depths. A long minute elapsed. Then he rose grinning, supporting the two sodden travellers one on each arm. They crawled ashore.

The behavior of the two visitors in this

crisis was characteristic. Greppo, gargling and spewing up a large mouthful of water, gaped at the comely visions before him. "Ladies' Night in a Turkish Bath," he exclaimed. "Very ambiguous." But Rudolph was always the gentleman. Politely he shook the drops from his hair and removed a hank of waterweed from his neck. He bowed to Stalacta.

"If this indeed be not a dream," he said, "tell me, bright being, who art thou, and where am I?"

Stalacta's reply was unexpected. "My preserver!" she cried cordially.

She explained to the startled Rudolph that some time before, wandering among the hills immersed in thought, she had heedlessly trodden within one of the fatal circles of the archfiend Zamiel.

"On the instant," she said, "I was trans-

formed into a white dove with shorn pinions. From beneath the rank leaves of an adder plant there glided a huge serpent. Rising from out its deadly coil, it poised itself to strike—when suddenly a youth, strangely present in that wild weird spot, seeing the danger of the trembling bird, bore me safely from the charmed spot, and gave me life and liberty."

"I do remember," said Rudolph.

"In recompense how can I serve thee?" asked Stalacta.

But this dialogue was lost on Greppo, who wandered about in an ecstasy. The scene around him was even better than the pictures in *La Vie Parisienne*. These graceful children, innocent as young Mirandas, crowded about him to survey his odd person; they laughed at his grotesque gestures and giggled when he stroked their silken shoulders. He called

them Marinierte Herring, and walked about picking up nuggets of shining mineral.

Stalacta, after hearing Rudolph's story, promised to put all her powers at his disposal. She loaded him with gold ingots, quartz crystals, gems and precious shells; particularly a very fine amethyst; that stone, she told him, is a talisman against drink, and therefore might be useful for an artist. Also she promised to recommend him in some influential women's clubs if he should ever go on the lecture platform. Then she bade Dragonfin bring her own boat to take the pair back to safety.

"But ere we part," she said gravely, "take thou this jewelled circlet." She gave him a ring from her hand. "Should danger threaten, as perchance it will, for baffled malice has a thousand stings, press but thy lips to the gem, and thou wilt find me by thy side."

Rudolph kissed her hand in homage. The enthusiastic girls, every one of whom had quite fallen in love with the handsome stranger, implored him to stay. But the thought of Amina in peril strengthened him to resist. It was hard to get Greppo away, but when they were both embarked the gnomes and amphibia showered them with shining flakes from the high walls of the cavern. The girls sang their camp song, and so in a rain of gold and a chorus of voices the boat bore them away.

"Gnomes!" said Greppo, dazed with wonder. "I gnome personally."

Chapter

10

HE castle of Wolfenstein was brilliant for the great masquerade ball. The Count had planned this magnificent party in Amina's honor. The period of probation had passed, and at this festival he was formally to announce her acceptance of his offer to become Countess of Wolfenstein. In the customary phrase, "a wedding has been arranged, and will shortly take place."

Relying on Professor Herzog's astrologies the Count had chosen for the mas-

querade the date September 22nd., the day after the autumn equinox; for then, as he cynically remarked, night resumes her supremacy over day. The terrace, the gardens, the public rooms of the vast château, all were exquisitely illumined for this gala event. The shrubberies were kept dark, but the rustic benches there were dusted. All the nobility and gentry of the Harz country were bidden and came in silks and travesties, masked for greater freedom in the revel.

In the preceding months the Count had had his bitter moments. He had fallen deeply, passionately in love with Amina; to one of his casual and cynical temperament this was a troubling experience. His sincere devotion was twitted by his moods of self-mockery. Amina, despite the influences of her shameless old foster-mother, remained gracious but cool. How much gay wickedness,

the Count reflected, he had given up for no return. "All is lost save dishonor," he remarked sourly to the Crook, "and I haven't even had the amusement of that." It will be seen that he had been suffering the pure hell of wounded egotism.

Professor Herzog also was moodily depressed. Stalacta's frustration of his scheme to ruin the artist had greatly shocked him. Time was passing and he had made no progress in winning a soul to wickedness as required by his contract with Zamiel. He had thought of exercising his wiles on Dame Barbara, but had soon concluded that this would not be within the scope of the agreement, for she was damned already. He kept himself going by occasional libations of the Altmodisches; rather dangerous for a sorcerer of his years and blood-pressure.

Amina too had made some explorations

into a hell of her own, as everyone must; and even her pious and affectionate spirit had been startled at life's ingenuity in devising individual and specialized variations of purgatory. Rudolph seemed to have disappeared; she had had no word from him. There was apparently no way in which he could transmit a message. The castle mail was censored by Von Puff. For all she knew he might even be dead. Let those who have groaned against the annoyances of the telephone reflect what ten pfennigs chiming in a pay station might have meant to her. The canary, whose cage she put every night on the bedside commode for companionship, had lost color and plumage: his sleep was broken by her smothered sobs.

But the great masquerade party was to mark a change of mood for all. The cynical Count, the evil sorcerer, the heartless old

beldame, even the tender Amina herself, all had tacitly decided to abandon sorrows and plunge into an anesthesia of gaiety. Puffengruntz had been busy with preparation; he had drilled the corps de chambre in new and volatile skits; Carline had rehearsed some hilarious songs. The Count had determined that this entertainment should be unforgettable.

The evening was clear and sweet. With gracious modesty and obedient to the starred rotation of the zodiac, Night resumed her alleged supremacy. It was such a night as abhors separations and denies the impossible. The lights of the proud schloss blazed over the mountainside, the music of harp and flute and fiddle shivered delicately on the terrace; mingled anon with the unholy zoom of a rudimentary saxophone, invented by Professor Herzog for this occasion in the earnest

hope of debauching a few souls. The villagers below heard it and shuddered.

Immense applause was given to Carline's rendering of *Tarara Boomdeay* which Von Puff had revised for the occasion. Supported by the choir of chambermaids (in demure Quaker gray underlaid by long black stockings and blush-pink shorts) she sang the words which every feudal chieftain in the Harz was humming shortly afterward:—

A sweet Tuxedo girl you see,
Queen of swell societee,
Fond of fun as fond can be
When it's on the strict Q.T.
I'm not too young, I'm not too old,
Not too timid, not too bold,
Just the kind you like to hold,
Just the kind of sport, I'm told . . .
Tarara Boomdeay, etc.

Not too fast and not too slow,
Sometimes Giddap, sometimes Whoa!
What a Young Girl Ought to Know:

Just how far it's safe to go.
Always ready for a lark
I went cycling in the park,
There I met a fresh young spark
And, as it was growing dark . . .
Tarara Boomdeay, etc.

I'm a daisy, a success,
Nice in manner, nice in dress,
I will make my way, I guess,
Like the Empire State Express.
Go where the Four Hundred goes,
Lunches at Delmonico's,
Drink that stuff of Veuve Clicquot's,
Ride in hansoms with my beaux. . . .
Tarara Boomdeay, etc.

I've a friend whose name is Jim,
Gee, I think a lot of him.
Took me to Long Branch to swim,
Said I had a pretty limb.
Summer sunshine brightly shone,
I can swim like any swan:
Mother scolded 'cause I'd gone
Bathing with no stockings on. . . .
Tarara Boomdeay, etc.

Amina was a little scandalized by this ditty, which was her first real introduction to the girl-and-music conception of life; but Carline was an unquestioned wow in the number. Before the festivity was over half a dozen of the assembled Ritterschaft had wangled a personal introduction and asked her if she didn't think it was a beautiful evening. There were plenty more verses, including one that Von Puff insisted on singing:—

I'm a boy from Brooklyn Heights,
How I like to sit up nights,
See the city's wicked sights,
Go to shows where girls wear tights.
I can hit the pace, no fear,
Sometimes drink a glass of beer;
Once I saw a girl, quite near,
Kick up to the chandelier. . . .
Tarara Boomdeay, etc.

This created such enthusiasm that many of the more impressionable guests began imitat-

ing the dance on their own account. The chorus involved a very considerable upward elevation of alternate feet, which requires practice rather than good intentions; but before these impromptus became too undignified the Count, Amina and Von Puff appeared on the terrace above, looking down on the masked revellers.

"Friends," said the Count, "for your tribute all my thanks sincere."

"Amina's greeting to all gathered here," she said, cleverly rhyming with his words.

"And in the banquet hall, light wines and beer," added Von Puff, which brought great huzza. The crowd trooped off for refreshments; Amina and the Count found themselves in a moment of privacy. She was very beautiful in a gown of gold and scarlet, and his lordship, warmed by dancing, doffed his

mask to admire her more freely. He was in sentimental mood.

"Now that we take off our masks we may be frank," he said. "I hope the revel is pleasing to the lady Amina."

"As much as aught can please one who is virtually a prisoner," she replied with some bitterness.

"Nay, Amina, you wrong me. I have tried to refrain from those solicitations that you found unwelcome; but there can be no reason for further delay."

"Even your lordship's consideration does not hide the relentless purpose behind it."

"I am not evil at heart," said the Count sadly, quite convincing himself. "As the geologies say of our own Brocken, I am a mass of palæozoic rock rising through strata of mesozoic, and bounded on all sides by faults—"

A group of the pretty chambermaids, escaped from the hazards of the shrubberies, overheard this speech and laughed merrily, then scampered off up the terrace stairway.

"But this baronial promiscuity," he continued, "is merely ceremonial. In my lighter moments I am purely domestic."

He came closer, suing for an embrace.

"I have even a vein of humor," he said gravely, "which your severity has given me no opportunity to exercise."

Amina pettishly kicked aside her long scarlet train and swept away from him. "Your jests are cruel," she said.

They were joined by Carline and Barbara; Carline flushed with Tarara Boomdeay, and the old lady with Moselle and liverwurst. She was in triumphant spirits over the approaching nuptial announcement.

"Phew," she cried, "the waltzing does take the starch out of one's linen."

"I wish it would take the starch out of Amina's disposition," said the Count.

"I can't understand anyone not feeling connubial on a night like this," said the Dame, languishing as she saw the chamberlain approach.

"My lord," said Von Puff importantly, "two of the guests, spying you here unmasked, ask permission to pay their homage to you and the Lady Amina."

The Count was annoyed to have been interrupted in his wooing. "Nay, it is early for personal salutes," he said shortly. "We do not unmask until the grand banquet."

"It is whispered," said the chamberlain, "that the one in the blue mask is no other than the young Prince Leopold."

Dame Barbara was greatly fluttered.

They resumed their masks, and the disguised guests were admitted; a tall and handsome figure in a doublet crusted with jewels, followed by a short and plump equerry whose gait was somewhat indefinite—perhaps due to the unaccustomed effect of the dark visor over his eyes.

"Our homage to the Lord of Wolfenstein," said the courtly visitor, bowing. "To Lady Amina, deeper homage still."

Amina started at the sound of that voice.

"And, to the Dame," added the guest, "whatever gesture's due." He made an obeisant inclination toward Dame Barbara, which, whether by chance or intention, brought the open thumb and fingers of his right hand in sweeping curve outward from his nose. It was one of his rare visitations of humor.

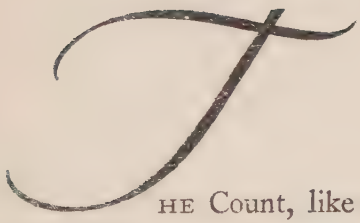
From under Amina's mask you might have

seen the spread of a tiny flush, a glow of hope and amazement.

So, and after perilous adventures, did Rudolph and the faithful Greppo win unsuspected admission to the castle.

Chapter

II



HE Count, like all accomplished rascals, had a nice concern for the outward gloss of conventional manners. He was more shocked by the gesture of disrepute employed toward Dame Barbara than he would have been by a ravishing in the Italian garden. But this eccentricity on the part of the visitor made it all the more probable that the unknown guest really was the young princeling Leopold of Bœotia.

"Sir," he said sternly, "you took advantage of a moment of informality."

Rudolph in his exaltation fell into blank verse,—

"Your lordship would forgive did he but know
How precious was that moment to his guests.
Meeting this lady in the whirl of masks,
Of all identities quite unaware,
She promised me the next ensuing dance;
Which I now claim."

"I think, sir, you presume," cried Wolfenstein, hand on rapier.

"Oh Lord, they're going to fight about it," babbled Greppo.

But Amina had found her voice. "The gentleman speaks true," she said quickly. "Am I to be mistress of Wolfenstein? I *did* promise him."

"It's not worth quarreling about," said Greppo to the Count, anxious to avoid battle. "Perhaps she'll let you cut in on the encore." Wolfenstein's pique might well have over-

come his hospitality, but he was fortunately called away by an anxious message from the cellarer whether it would be all right to open up another bin of the Moselle, and Rudolph was able to escort Amina to the ballroom. They had just a moment for impassioned whisper.

"Rudolph!"

"My own!"

In the figures of the dance they could not properly converse; but at least the felicity of disguise made it possible to delight in full security in each other's blessed nearness.

As though by the arrangement of a practical dramatist (who always ties his threads so much more neatly than poor old actual life) we see the torch-and-moonlit terrace clear itself for the next movement of plot. The music in the ballroom stirred Von Puff

to invite the hankering Dame Barbara to a little footwork.

"Madam," he asked, "May we do a schottische?"

"You may have the honor," she replied, twittering.

"I'll take the dance," he said. "You can keep your honor."

With this exit Dame Barbara disappears from the story; that remains her tragic epitaph.

Greppo meanwhile fell immediate victim to Carline's charms; and so unaccountable are the tastes of pretty women that she found this naïve bumpkin more appealing than any of the powerful feudalists who had been inviting her to walk round the grounds. Greppo's alert appetite suggested to him that food would be available somewhere, and Carline led him to the retainers' table in the court-

yard where he was soon aromatic with marinierte herring.

"You seem fond of fish," she said.

He was hampered by his mask, which did not fit very well, but he beamed upon her as best he could.

"It's pretty strong," he admitted; "but you take some too, and then whatever happens we'll start even."

She took some, and he felt pleased that the longer evenings were coming. "Fish!" he exclaimed. "Say, I'd like to take you to the Stalactite Grotto. Greatest place you ever saw for fish, and amazoons."

"You know lots of long words, big boy," she said. "What are amazoons?"

Greppo was on his mettle. Fortunately he remembered a phrase of the Black Crook's.

"Presumably feminine, unquestionably biped," he replied.

"Well, you don't need to go to a road-house for that," she said. "We've got a plenty of 'em right here. Didn't you see me do Tarara?"

"I was late getting here," he said.

"Come on down in the perennial garden and I'll do it for you now," she said.

They got along famously.

But Professor Herzog had had an anxious pricking in his thumbs all evening. He took no part in the merriment, but prowled uneasily about, occasionally visiting the buffet for a glass of wine, repairing moodily to the library to turn over the books, or rambling through the gardens. He was somewhat encouraged by symptoms of likely damnation among some of the celebrants, but reflected that he could not claim any credit therefor under the terms of his contract, since this was Count Wolfenstein's party, not his. Then, in

an evil moment, he passed an evergreen arbor, slightly scorched after a long summer, where Greppo was happily embraced with the delicious Carline. The rustic swain, tingling with fish and infatuation, had innocently laid aside his mask and the Crook recognized him.

Instantly the sorcerer realized the truth. It did not then take him long to spot Rudolph talking apart with Amina.

The lovers stood in shadow at one corner of the terrace. Above them the towering castle shone with light, boomed with music and wassail. The Count's party was beginning to get a little boisterous. From the armory rose a strong chorus where the men-at-arms of visiting gentry had joined harmony in a drinking song. Above the mixed chatter of the banquet hall came the shrill scream of Von Puff's hysteric laugh, the particular laugh which always only briefly preceded his

desire to play the bagpipes. The shrubberies were alive with assorted rustlings, sighs, whispers, sudden sopranos of mirth, endearments of Teutonic directness and audibility, or a random succession of gutturals where a groping gallant had tried to walk through a holly or hawthorn tree.

But all this gross tempest curved over the innocent pair like a shell of light and sound. They were untouched by it. They were together, reunion was sweet. His young arms were around her, and he saw in her face that look a man sees but seldom in a woman's eyes, which no painter—not even Rudolph Werner—has limned for us.

"All is ready for our flight," he was whispering into Amina's ear. "On the borders of the forest swift horses are concealed. After midnight, when all is quiet, I will be beneath your window—"

Rudolph did not know Count Wolfenstein's feudal parties. About midnight, when the weaklings had been weeded out, the uproar would begin in earnest.

The Black Crook gazed furiously at them. Surrounded as they were by the subtle magic of young love, overt action would be vain; but he could by his sorcery put ideas into their minds. He was cunning: he projected into them the notion to sing. Alas that passion and prudence so rarely cohabit. Young idiots! Now, now was the moment they should have fled, ere the alarm was bruited about; now, like Keats's wiser lovers, they should have glided past the bloated wassailers and the sagacious bloodhound, fled away into the wilderness of fairyland; and what do they do but join hands and sing a duet. Almost I lose patience with them; and how patient I have been. They sang *Ah Never Deem My Love*

Can Change, and sang it charmingly; but it gave Herzog time to warn the Count.

Terrible was the fury of the Crook as he hurried to find his lordship. "Foiled!" he raged. "Tricked! Crossed in the hour of victory! My chosen victim lives, and flushed with triumph and vast hoards of gold stalks boldly forth to mock me. Oh fool, to work, to work! A soul once tampered with must be pursued. I'll track him as the sleuth-hound tracks the stag. He must, he shall be mine!"

The Count had had a feeling that things were not going as they should. The cellarman, misunderstanding his instructions, had broken into the reserve of very rare Château Yquem instead of using the Moselblumchen *ordinaire* which was quite adequate for the heavy traffic of less discriminating guests. Also some sportive visitor, carelessly nosing in the sacred library, had dropped caviare and

pâté de foie gras on the pages of the Strassburg Boccaccio. Now came Herzog with his strange news.

With an appalling blasphemy the Count seized the bell-rope and rang the tocsin, the *alerte* signal for fire, battle, or any general alarm. Bruno and Wulfgar, followed by the armed guard, tumbled up noisily from the cellars, hiccuping and bristling. The maskers poured milling into the garden. Ladies screamed, gentry ran anxiously to find swords and weapons they had laid aside in the shrubberies. Herzog and the Count, with drawn steel, hurried onto the upper terrace.

"Let no one stir," cried Wolfenstein in a voice of thunder. "Guard every avenue that leads from hence. Bear with me, friends, there's treason in our midst."

Rudolph and Amina were at one side of the agitated throng. The lover's face was grim

beneath his blue mask. He loosened his blade in its scabbard. Amina clung half-fainting to him. "Lost, lost!" she cried desolately.

A buzz of astonishment rose as the guards, hurriedly hooking their plated tunics, trampled down the double stair from the upper level and posted themselves at the garden exits. Wolfenstein's imperious tones again dominated the tumult.

"'Tis said a serf, usurping the semblance of a noble prince and bent on outrage, has dared to mingle with this goodly throng. If this be false, to all I'll make amends for this rude breaking-in upon the general joy. If it be true, 'tis fit we know it. Therefore I command that all do here unmask."

All visors came off save Rudolph's. He alone, guiding Amina, moved through the dividing throng toward the foot of the balustrade. With a snarl of hatred Herzog pointed

to him. The Count, glittering down the stair, came swiftly toward him.

"Unmask!" he cried.

Rudolph tore off the strip of blue silk and in the same motion rippled out his rapier. They engaged, and the stair was a glimmer of searching steel in the torchlight. Rudolph, shielding Amina behind him, retreated warily up one wing of the stair, the furious Count pressing him hard with thrust and feint. Rudolph's upper position gave him momentary vantage, but the experienced Count was the stronger sword. He cornered Rudolph against the upper balustrade. The Black Crook, darting from above, was in act to strike the boy behind when Amina flung herself wildly against the old marplot and tripped him so that he rolled and tangled in his cloak. But Bruno and Wulfgar with heavy weapons were now about to attack the cornered hero. He

seemed doomed. The girl screamed in anguish.

Then Rudolph remembered Stalacta's talisman. He raised his left hand to his lips.

Strange moment! There seemed to be a puff of unearthly light, a deep and rending explosion as though the coarse tough fabric of natural law had been torn asunder. For an instant everything went dark; a black-out as stage directors say; all was silent but for the clatter of the Count's sword falling on the stone steps. Then in a renewed bloom of clear rosy light Stalacta's noble figure stood there, centered in every gaze, goddess with face of destiny. Beautiful in silken limbs, torso moulded in flexible golden stomacher, she stood to command, and from the terrace above came marching her feminine host. Each of her beautiful regiment was clad like herself, shapely with shining leg and loin, confirmed

above by a light shimmering mail. Mail and female created she them.

The march of the Amazons must remain forever a legend and a dream. Perhaps it was a symbol of woman's immortal power: creator and preserver of mankind, matrix of arts and imaginations, of tenderness, trouble and irritability. Guests and guardsmen drew instinctively aside, disbelieving chieftain and addled sorcerer gazed in stupor, as the endless files of Stalacta's virgins flowed and flowered in musical array. Strong men crumbled before that irresistible parade of frailty. In ever-changing perspective of curve and feature, in undulant echelons of haunch and bosom, in shining parallels of leg and thigh, in level serries of grave loveliness and with bright beacons of mischief among some of the baby amazons and younger Girl Scouts, they rhymed and rippled, rotated and returned in

rows until masculine watchers trembled to consider the humorous fecundity of life. Stalacta, calm and dangerous observer of the meanings of existence, had resolved on this incontrovertible argument of comeliness. Later matriarchs have sought to celebrate the triumph of woman's hilarious intellect by Bryn Mawr May-poles or Vassar daisy-chains. Stalacta, far in advance of her epoch, divined already that man will always take cover before any display of woman's resolution. Man sometimes guesses truth, but woman *is* truth; and man's duty is to embrace it.

How, in so invincible a demonstration of the biological divine comedy, could any philosopher take seriously the wiles of malice or the arduous pretences of society?

Alas, in his anger Count Wolfenstein's sense of humor had shrivelled. "Unnatural invaders!" he shouted absurdly, in a mi-

sogynist frenzy. "See if they are proof against the manly steel. Guards, attack them!"

Shamefacedly the obedient soldiers levelled their halberds toward those beautiful breasts, but the mocking gaze of an equal number of lovely eyes was too much for them. Their weapons fell; their spirits rose. They desired only to fraternize with this enemy; they would gladly have held a Bathing Beauty contest and elected a Miss Harz.

"Your mortal weapons," said Stalacta calmly, "are helpless before the Power of Love."

Chapter

12

UDOLPH and Amina did not wait to see the end of the Amazon rally. They seized opportunity and fled. Attended by Greppo they galloped through the forests on horseback, and at last found what seemed a safe hiding place on the farthest seacoast of Bohemia.

On that wild and lawless littoral they came by chance upon a tumbledown deserted old fortress. Its history they could not guess, but

entering through its broken gateway of huge timbers they hailed it as a fortunate asylum. The hardy vagabonds and beachcombers of that country passed to and fro by their retreat, but so discreetly did the trio conceal themselves in the rearward attics of the ancient ruin that no enemy would have guessed their presence. The faithful Greppo foraged for them, and managed by ingenious drolleries to cajole an occasional sandwich or a flagon of the small beer of the neighborhood. Rudolph resumed his painting, and in a little garret under the slanting roof worked hard at his canvases. In that sheltered privacy Amina felt no embarrassment in posing in any way that would be helpful; and as the autumn grew chilly they found a small stove to warm their studio. When the pinch of poverty, more troublesome than frosty weather, began to nip, they were more than once tempted to try

to pawn Stalacta's magic ring; but grateful sentiment as well as wise precaution caused them to cherish the talisman. Amina, loyal and enthusiastic child, presently felt they were safe enough for her to issue into the country-side, and found herself a clerical position in the headquarters of a predatory baron who had seized upon the Public Utilities of that region. Her wages sufficed to keep Rudolph and the faithful Greppo from absolute want.

Their stronghold was a strange old place. Its great hall, roofed over by noble beams and surrounded on three sides by a gallery, would have done credit to any feudal castle. It must have been the abandoned workshop of some powerful sorcerer, forced by sudden doom to flee in haste; the rooms were littered with queer furnitures and properties, some of which they repaired and adapted for their

modest housekeeping. Above the whole building was a huge magnificent attic, cavernous, dusty, and romantic. There the rain drummed on the sharp-angled roof, the cold winds of autumn whistled through broken panes, but they stuffed the chinks with newspapers and chopped old jettisoned lumber for fuel. Sitting by candlelight in the attic room, where fire hummed in the little stove and sausages hissed in the pan, the three spent happy evenings recalling their strange adventures or looking forward in the sure confidence of youth to marvellous futures. The old fortress creaked eerily in the dark, and occasional marauders broke in and had to be frightened away. They had found an old bone-white skeleton lying in a corner. When any prowling ruffian attempted to invade their lair they lowered this tragic bundle of bones by a rope through a trap in the attic floor. This was

enough to rout the superstitious longshoremen of Bohemia.

On the roof they built a little platform, an eyrie from which, far away, they could see rising the serrated pinnacles of the Harz.

But a feudal lord like Wolfenstein is not to be disposed of just by filling his castle with troops of buxom Girl Scouts. The Count, once recovered from his astonishment, was bitter for revenge. And Professor Herzog was desperate, for his year of grace was running out; he put all his ingenuities to work, and soon rumor came to him (from the Sorcerers' Board of Trade) that the fugitives were living in the abandoned fortress, that the mortgage and taxes were overdue on the property, and that they might be ejected by due process of law.

One afternoon Rudolph and Amina were rambling sentimentally in the Bohemian wil-

derness. Rudolph was hopeful, and spoke confidently of the time when he might be able to get a new suit of clothes and return to civilization to show his paintings to dealers. Like the Japanese artists who do a hundred views of Fuji, so he had done a series of drawings of Amina in a century of perspectives, and he felt sure they were salable. But Amina had been troubled by uneasy premonitions. "There seems to be a danger in the air," she said. Rudolph laughed at her, but then they heard a distant horn blown in the forest. Amina trembled, but Rudolph insisted it was only Greppo's call. Their henchman had separated from them in the pursuit of game for supper. This blast, Rudolph believed, was merely Greppo's view-halloo on finding an inexpensive lunch-wagon. But as they made their way in the direction of the call they were suddenly surprised by Wolfenstein and Her-

zog. These pitiless enemies rushed upon Rudolph with bared weapons. Hastily the artist fell on guard, but the odds were hopeless. He would have perished but had just time to kiss Stalacta's ring. Appearing magically at his side the benignant enchantress routed the Count and the sorcerer. The latter made an ineffective attempt to fire the forest and burn out the lovers, but again Stalacta's rescuing magic prevailed.

Count Wolfenstein was a thoroughly practical man. He never believed in throwing good effort after bad, and the overhead expense of the campaign was growing impossible. Besides, the Crook, who now nourished a perpetual grouch, was beginning to be a tedious companion. So the Count gave up and returned to his castle. He was beginning to suspect, moreover, that as an ally Stalacta would be an even greater help than Amina.

He determined to do nothing further to anger the powerful feminist.

But there was no retreat possible for the Black Crook. He had, so to speak, endorsed Zamiel's paper and now he had to make good. The year had elapsed, and now we witness the dreadful scene in Pandemonium when Zamiel calls for his reckoning. On a throne above the fiery pit, where fumes leaped and wreathed from clear abysses of flame (the effect-machine again) the fiend sat grimly in judgment and called up his auditors. They appeared, as scarlet as the ink in the Herzog ledger. They reported the sorcerer irretrievably in the red. According to hellish custom, the accounting was done in musical recitative; this was Zamiel's infernal oratorio:—

> Another year, one more, one more,
> Completes the hellish journal:
> How stands the total of the score,

The register infernal?
We balance now the Book of Sin
So credit each damnation in.
Let every fiend who cannot show
His quota for the flame below
To everlasting torment go,
To agony eternal!

Another year, one more, one more!
How stands the total of the score?
We balance now the Book of Sin
So credit each damnation in
To burn on Satan's altar.
How stands the total of the score?
Let purgatory kindle for
The fiend who is defaulter!

There was a moment's awful pause; then Zamiel's thrilling voice was heard resounding through the Accounting Department, which, for efficiency, is nearest to the burning chasm.

"How stands the record of the dying year?" he asked with sombre exultation. "Has every seed brought forth its sinful fruit? Is

all the harvest gathered in? Is every bond fulfilled?"

"All," replied the chief auditor. "All save one."

"Who plays the laggard?" asked Zamiel in terrible tones.

"Herzog, the Black Crook."

The Devil always knows the exact time; Zamiel needed no reference to a wrist-watch. "If when the brazen tongue of clamorous Time proclaims the appointed hour, the wail of no fresh soul by him betrayed breaks on the air of Hell, let him be summoned!" He was going to have no pity for the Black Crook. This was the alchemist who had invented the Altmodisches and had kept to himself so fertile a poison. He deserved damnation.

The chimes of perdition rang twelve dreadful notes. Willing fiends and auditors, drag-

ging the wretched sorcerer, prodding him with hot forks, flung him into the brimstone crater. There was one incinerating sizzle, and he was gone.

On the very same day, by good coincidence, Rudolph and Amina returned to the village and were married very quietly. They stopped at the village post-office to collect the accumulated mail, and the first thing Amina found was a letter from Doctor Rosenbach. Sagacious collectors never overlook a hunch, and the Doctor had been interested by Amina's naïve appeal. He wrote that he was making a special trip to Germany to look at Incunabula, and would stop off at Wolfenstein to see Rudolph's paintings.

At Greppo's suggestion they moved into the sorcerer's old cabin, which after a good German housecleaning proved to be a very

comfortable little cottage, quiet and secluded and with a water-fall near by for bathing. The alchemist's furnace was just the thing for baking gingerbread. Rudolph was so busy getting settled and framing his canvases that he forgot until some time later to ask Amina a question that had puzzled him.

"What *are* Incunabula?" he asked when he remembered.

Amina, who had been looking in one of the Crook's dictionaries, blushed prettily. She had not intended to tell him so soon.

When Doctor Rosenbach arrived he was friendly and encouraging about Rudolph's paintings but he was much more interested in the queer books and papers left by the sorcerer. It turned out splendidly for everyone, as among the Crook's volumes was a wonderful Gutenberg Bible which the Doctor purchased at a price that staggered the lucky

couple. The two precious tomes were in mint state, for evidently they had never been opened.

Doctor Rosenbach also called at the castle, and was much interested in his lordship's library of curiosa. He reports that Count Wolfenstein, though still cynical, is not without redeeming softnesses; for the Count has taken great care of Amina's canary and cherishes the bird as a tender souvenir. By Doctor Rosenbach's kindly intermediation the Count bought the series of 100 Views of Amina, and often looks at them affectionately.

As Doctor Rosenbach was saying goodbye to Rudolph and Frau Werner, Amina said mischievously, "But I thought you came to look at Incunabula."

"So I did," he said. "Have you any more?"

She showed him the baby in the cradle.

THE

JOHN DAY

COMPANY

INC.

BINDERY
AND TO
MAY 27 1941
PLEASE
MANCHESTER, IND.